

Official Xbox Magazine

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XBOX 2002: WE'VE SEEN THE FUTURE

1. Project Ego
2. Wreckless
3. Buffy the Vampire Slayer
4. Genma Onimusha

Exclusive NEWS & SCREENS

WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!

HALO

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WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!

THE NEW FACE OF FIGHTING GAMES

DEAD OR ALIVE 3

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13 HARD-HITTING XBOX REVIEWS!

December 2001
Premiere Issue

PROJECT GOTHAM — EXCLUSIVE

NFL FEVER 2002



TONY HAWK 2x



FUZION FRENZY — EXCLUSIVE



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AAAAHHHH

FEATURE: DoA3 A massive feature, new shots, and a full review! Fight! Page 36





VAMPY!

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER Page 59



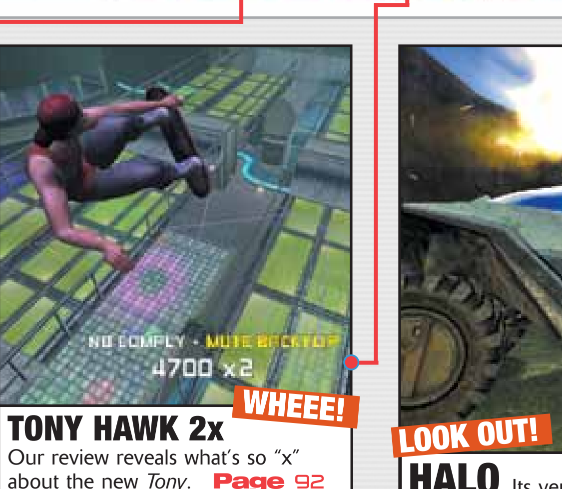
RACY!

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING Just another exclusive review for your reading pleasure. Page 96



HUT... HUT...

NFL Fever 2002 Finally, *Madden* gets some stiff-arm competition on the football field. Page 110



WHEEE!

TONY HAWK 2x Our review reveals what's so "x" about the new *Tony*. Page 92



LOOK OUT!

HALO Its very first review, anywhere. Page 84

■ **THE REAL DEAL:** This, technically, is Issue One, since last month's issue was only a preview, and it was technically Issue Zero. That probably makes it a collector's item. Better check eBay...

■ **MOST OVERUSED TERM EVER:** "World Exclusive" is thrown around with such abandon in the magazine business that we hesitated to even use it, but since our "World Exclusives" are actually world-exclusive, we figured you wouldn't mind so much.



It's official.

We finally made it. After nearly two years of speculation, rumor, hope, and hype, we are just a few days away from the launch of the mighty Xbox – and the Premiere Issue of **Official Xbox Magazine** is here to make sure you get the most out of your Xbox experience.

I won't bore you with the details of the extensive process required to become an Official magazine (basically, we had to prove to Microsoft that we could make a better magazine than anyone in the world), but I will tell you what "Official" should mean to you. Official means we have unrivaled access to Xbox games, people, and news. We'll know about them first. We'll play them first. And our readers – and our readers only – will read about *and* play them first.

As it happens, this issue is a perfect example. We sent two editors all the way to Japan for the world-exclusive review of the stunning *Dead or Alive 3* (page 36). At the same time, we sent four editors up to Microsoft HQ so they could be the first in the world to sit down and play final versions of the stellar first-party titles *Halo* (page 84), *Fuzion Frenzy* (page 104), *Project Gotham Racing* (page 96), and *NFL Fever 2002* (page 110).

So the world-exclusive reviews aren't enough? You want to know what Xbox games are in your future? Well, nobody else has detailed information and completely new screens on future Xbox titles *Wreckless* (page 12), *Genma Onimusha* (page 16), or *Project Ego* (page 54). Still not enough? How about our DVD stuffed with over 60 minutes of exclusive Xbox game footage? Oh, you want to test out the best Xbox games for yourself? Better buy our next issue, then, because our Xbox Game Disc is the ONLY place you'll be able to get fully playable demos of killer new games like *Tony Hawk 2x* and *Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee*.

We are the only **Official Xbox Magazine** in the world, and the only Xbox source you'll ever need. And that, my friends, is official.



— Mike Salmon, editor-in-chief
Official Xbox Magazine

Meet the team

If music be the food of love, then video games must be sex-burgers. With fries and a Coke.

Mike Salmon
editor-in-chief

Favorite Food: Chili's fried cheese sticks dipped in the cheesy goodness of their queso dip – if only there were a way to deep fry that and then dip it in more cheese. Mmmmm.
Least Favorite Food: Raisins. I don't like any food that reminds me of Grandma Dixie naked.
Favorite Launch Game: *TransWorld Surf* isn't my favorite game, but I am, surprisingly, playing it way too much.
Dumbest Purchase Ever: A SNES RPG where I thought the cover art would represent the game. The box lied.

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Frank O'Connor
executive editor

Favorite Food: Anything with Tabasco sauce. Not Crystal, not Dave's Insanity Sauce, not Doctor Death's Sauce of Doom. Old-school, classic Tabasco. Not bad for something that's made with just two ingredients.
Least Favorite Food: Celery is the only food I don't like. And even that's okay if it's boiled. Like in chowder.
Favorite Launch Game: *DoA3* – so good it's weird.
Dumbest Purchase Ever: Electric cat-poo scooper. They ALL break. I'm on my third one now. Maybe they really *are* just for cats.

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Sarah Ellerman
managing editor

Favorite Food: I am a devotee of In-N-Out Burger. I think I might have moved to California just to eat a perfectly crafted Wish Burger and the most beautiful fries on the planet. Plus they have tons of lemon slices so I can make my favorite drink, the "Battery-Acid Coke."
Least Favorite Food: I pretend to like salad. But I lie.
Favorite Launch Game: *Munch's Oddysee*. It's got creatures and plights. Creatures and plights are good.
Dumbest Purchase Ever: A $1,300 scanner. I cry when I think about it. Crappier than a $99 one from Walgreens.

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Dan Egger
features editor

Favorite Food: Biscuits and cheese. Southern-style biscuits. Anything on biscuits is good. I once had chocolate on biscuits. And that was some good eatin'.
Least Favorite Food: Cilantro. Vile weed. It tastes like a little rancid-bush.
Favorite Launch Game: *NFL Fever* – I gots tha feva!
Dumbest Purchase Ever: A 10 pound bag of donuts that were almost a week old (true story) My roommates and I tried to eat them as fast as possible, but we eventually had to give most of them to my dog.

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Francesca Reyes
senior editor

Favorite Food: Fran Pocky. Obviously. I have to say that I like the strawberry best. And not because it's pink.
Least Favorite Food: Chicken, although I *will* eat it in nugget form. It's the bones I object to. I'm not about munching stuff off of skeletons. I'm not a zombie, after all.
Favorite Launch game: *DoA3*.
Dumbest Purchase Ever: A brown 1990 Honda Civic, the year just before they became indestructible. Mine is quite destructible.

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Mike Wilmoth
art director

Favorite Food: Pizza. Pepperoni is my pizza of choice, but I'm not averse to sausage. Veggie pizza is a waste of my time, however. The excessive onions, tomatoes, and occasionally garlic just mask the flavor of the cheesy goodness.
Least Favorite Food: I told you already. VEGGIE PIZZA!
Favorite Launch Game: Easily *Halo*.
Dumbest Purchase Ever: Crayola Crayon #776, Infra Brown. It's a color that can't be seen in the normal UV spectrum. I can't find it now.

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Juliann Brown
associate art director

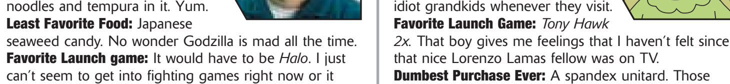
Favorite Food: Sushi. Rock 'N' Roll is my fave, although sushi purists will claim it isn't real. I'm quite fond of eel, though.
Least Favorite Food: Steak. Seriously. Yuck. It's muscles, plain and simple, and I'm not a vegetarian either.
Favorite Launch game: I don't play fighting games a whole heckuva lot, but because it looks so yummy, I'd have to say *DoA3*.
Dumbest Purchase Ever: 1989 Saab 900t. It ended up costing me 40k. It was a nice color, though. Charcoal.

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Dave Rees
DVD editor

Favorite Food: Noodles. Specifically, udon. Nothing's tastier than a bowl of dashi with noodles and tempura in it. Yum.
Least Favorite Food: Japanese seaweed candy. No wonder Godzilla is mad all the time.
Favorite Launch game: It would have to be *Halo*. I just can't seem to get into fighting games right now or it would be *DoA3*.
Dumbest Purchase Ever: I waited in line for eight hours to get a PlayStation2, then I waited eight months for a reason to play it.

drees@imaginemedia.com



Grandma Dixie
cookie baker

Favorite Food: Baked prunes.
Least Favorite Food: Ribbon candy... but I can foist it on my idiot grandkids whenever they visit.
Favorite Launch Game: *Tony Hawk 2x*. That boy gives me feelings that I haven't felt since that nice Lorenzo Lamas fellow was on TV.
Dumbest Purchase Ever: A spandex unitard. Those ladies on my exercise stories looked so attractive in them, I thought I'd try the same... who could have known that it would make me look dumpy?

Write a nice old-fashioned paper letter.

■ **WORST FOOD?:** Mr. Donut in Japan serves curry and egg-salad-filled donuts. It might not kill you, but the guy in the next stall is dead.



Issue 01 ■ December, 2001

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MEDIA WITH PASSION
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Light fantastic tripped

The lighting in *Wreckless* is incomparable, especially in the nighttime sequences. Other so-called next-gen racers are beggared by the sheer polygon counts here, but add to the intricate detail the layers and layers of neon, argon, and halogen light, and you have a game whose look is beginning to typify the Xbox experience – total realism – right down to the sickly phosphor glow in the night sky above Hong Kong.

■ It'll make you think twice about walking on city streets.

■ *Wreckless* fittingly makes other driving games look rather "pedestrian."

A mix of real cars and fake – but there's no mistaking this for GT3.

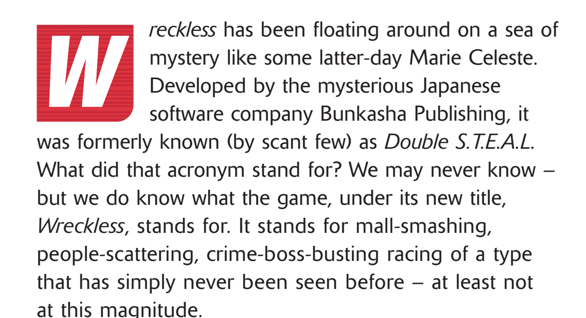
What is Soylent Green again?

It's people, and one of the most intriguing aspects of *Wreckless* is its pedestrian content. Harried businessmen are made more harried by your automotive onslaught. Cute secretaries flee in terror from your bubble car, and marketplaces chock-full with vendors and customers suddenly find themselves in the middle of an epic car chase. Not sure at this point if you get points for hitting them or avoiding them. But you can't ignore them.

DEVELOPER: **Bunkasha Publishing**
PUBLISHER: **Activision** | RELEASE DATE: **Spring 2002**

Wreckless

Why race an oval when you can drive through the mall in a monster truck?



W*reckless* has been floating around on a sea of mystery like some latter-day Marie Celeste. Developed by the mysterious Japanese software company Bunkasha Publishing, it was formerly known (by scant few) as *Double S.T.E.A.L.* What did that acronym stand for? We may never know – but we do know what the game, under its new title, *Wreckless*, stands for. It stands for mall-smashing, people-scattering, crime-boss-busting racing of a type that has simply never been seen before – at least not at this magnitude.

When we first laid eyes on a short, jagged video of the game, we were inspired by the amazing physics as monster trucks smashed into buses and plate glass flew apart after impact. We thought, "That's what physics should be about. Smashing stuff to bits and driving as fast as is humanly possible through crowded Hong Kong markets."

Bizarrely, there's even a plot – some glib nonsense about taking down the Hong Kong Mafia structure. And there are two plotlines, but either way you're a good guy. Big deal. That doesn't explain why the game gives you the chance to smash your way through 20 different missions, in 10 different vehicles, ranging from an absurdly large monster truck (complete with fully-active gas struts) to a Messerschmitt bubble car. And mission objectives vary wildly, not unlike those seen in *Driver*. It might be a straight race against time, or you might have to stop another marauding vehicle in its giant, 3D, gloriously bump-mapped tracks.

Driving insanity that may invalidate your factory warranty.

The game's emphasis on physics isn't just for show – the cars suffer damage from the abuse you hurl at them. Although you can leap at one hundred miles per hour from an overpass onto the roof of a bus traveling below, it's insanity that may invalidate your factory warranty somewhat. That and the traffic patterns (based on real-life Hong Kong gridlock) mean that there's a real element of method required to traverse this madness. And watch out for peeps. Perfectly animated humans scatter and dodge (though, sadly, they don't splat) as you careen through the teeming streets.

As you can plainly see from the screenshots, *Wreckless* is even more detailed than the thoroughly amazing *Project Gotham*, and as our nighttime shots reveal, it has even better neon than *DoA3*. XBOX

COMING SOON…

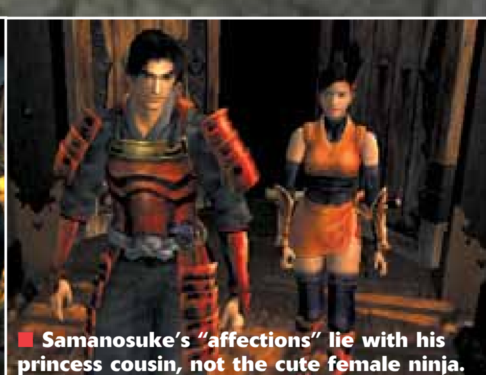
Next month, we'll have a massive preview of *Wreckless*, with amazing new shots and info, a trailer on our Xbox game disc, and an interview with Japanese developer Bunkasha!

■ **URKELMOBILE:** Although the *GT* series claims to offer the most cars, to our knowledge, only *Wreckless* lets you drive a Messerschmitt bubble car, as used by Urkel on *Family Matters*.

■ **WRECKING CRUDE:** Why is the game called *Wreckless*? That would imply a lack of wrecks, when in fact, the game is nothing less than the biggest series of car wrecks ever. Maybe there's a Stealth mode…

Souls are up for grabs between the player and the enemy in Genma Onimusha.

One of the few graphic tweaks for the Xbox is the much-improved lighting, as witnessed in this epic rooftop showdown.


Samanosuke's "affections" lie with his princess cousin, not the cute female ninja.

Huh?

According to Capcom, the word "genma" is derived from two different Chinese characters. "Gen" means *illusion*, while "ma" can be defined as either *magic* or *demon*. The word "onimusha" is simply *demon warrior*. Therefore, put them all together and you have either "illusion magic demon warrior" or "illusionary demon demon warrior." We would have voted for *Super Happy Fun Bunny Donut Demon Bonanza*, but this one is good, too.

DEVELOPER: **Capcom**
PUBLISHER: **Capcom** | RELEASE DATE: **Spring 2002**

Genma Onimusha

Less with the unlocking, more with the killing

Although in style and function, *Onimusha* is somewhat indebted to both *Resident Evil* and *Dino Crisis*, its emphasis on action over lockpicking – and character skills over sophomoric herb-combining – leads it very much down the path Capcom is also taking with *Devil May Cry*. *Onimusha* is still laden with foreboding dread and suspense, but it's dense with activity and, most importantly, action. Now, a revamped, retooled version is headed to Xbox in the form of *Genma Onimusha*.

With a storyline pieced together from both Japanese historical fact and fiction, players wield their virtual swords as the samurai Samanosuke Akechi, who must battle demons in order to save a princess from death and his country from the grasp of an undead warlord. But throughout the game, those who played through the original will notice a number of significant changes.

According to Kenji Inafune, the producer responsible for both versions of *Onimusha*, his team is pitching *Genma* straight to "hardcore" gamers. To do this, Capcom has included new enemies and attacks, which will shore up the game's difficulty considerably. The most marked change from the original will be the ability of your enemies to absorb souls. Therefore, when you defeat a monster, you'll have to compete against live enemies in order to absorb the soul. If the enemy absorbs it before you, it will become more powerful and possibly evolve into a new type of monster.

Laden with foreboding dread and suspense...

In addition, players will also now be able to access a new area, called the "Ancient Forest," beyond a door that was previously locked in the original *Onimusha*. With these factors to take into account, we're hoping that *Genma Onimusha* ends up more than a simple remix. XBOX


New armor, new enemies, and new skills beef up *Genma*'s appeal for returning fans.


No better way to start your day than a rousing game of tug-of-war for the soul.

COMING SOON...

We're close to getting our grubby mitts on a playable of *Genma Onimusha* in the office to see, firsthand, what Capcom means by keeping it real for the "hardcore" market. Expect a full report of how it plays next month or perhaps the month after.

ONIMUSHA: THE MOVIE?: In our interview with Kenji Inafune (producer of both *Onimushas*) he states, "I know as a base, *Onimusha* can be a good movie. Not a Japanese movie. I would like it to be done in Hollywood." A samurai movie? Sweet, we say.

NOBUNAGA'S AMBITION: The bad guy in *Onimusha* is none other than Oda Nobunaga, an actual soldier of fortune who aimed to militarily unify Japan. He took his own life at age 49; he is now remembered mainly through KOEI strategy games.



Launch sequence

Behind the complex machinations of a major console launch

On November 15, 2001, the Xbox will finally hit stores. After more than 20 months of rumor, speculation, marketing, hype, and even backlash, the world's most powerful console will finally be a reality in the consumer world. But as with any launch, there are a number of issues that will determine whether the launch is a success or failure.

When the PlayStation2 exploded onto the scene last year, many pointed to hardware shortages and deemed the launch a failure – even though millions of PS2 units made their way into homes. Some of the same people pointed to the Dreamcast's quick start as a sure indicator of future success, only to predictably have their predictions proved false.

In truth, the fate of a console launch is rarely decided by a single factor, and the Xbox launch is no different. For better or worse, what happens during the early days of this console will be based on a cumulative effect of a wide number of mission-critical factors. On the facing page, to the right of the shuttle launch, we explain them.



> > > Launch Central < < <



Launch Variable: COMPETITION (SONY)

Despite dropping the price of the PS2 around $100 in Europe, Sony has announced that it will not drop the price of the console in the US before the holidays. Until recently, it was widely believed that a price drop to $199 was imminent for Sony's box.

Xbox Launch Status

In price terms, the Xbox should start on a level playing field with the PS2. However, it's always possible that Sony could drop the price at the last minute, especially since the precedent has been set in Europe.

Launch Variable: COMPETITION (Nintendo)

The videogame industry wouldn't be what it is today without Nintendo. Of course, Nintendo today isn't what is was in its heyday. The once-invincible videogame giant stumbled with the Japanese launch of the GameCube (see news story, page 24) and could face a similar struggle with its US launch.

Xbox Launch Status

It's not yet been proved that the gaming public can support three consoles. Since the PS2 is doing well in sales, the key battle is for second place…

15621 9959 678594 345247 957223 g0873 54463 346534 563465 325425 09732 1986745 8244344 09875 346520 12156473 5`2384-42 46870 1234 00231 23514

Launch Variable: THE ECONOMY

After nearly a decade of unprecedented growth, the American economy is going through a downturn. During the boom years, huge console launches were all but guaranteed. Now that the economy is tighter, however, people may be reluctant to spend big bucks on videogames.

Xbox Launch Status

At launch, this really isn't a huge concern since Microsoft will be pumping on all cylinders just to fulfill demand. However, if the recession gets worse, then the $299 price may start to look a little steep to consumers who are seeing their discretionary income wane.

Launch Variable: THE TIMING

Despite many denials to the contrary, Microsoft finally announced that it would push back the launch of the Xbox one full week to November 15 – but even with this delay, Microsoft will still be in stores before the GameCube.

Xbox Launch Status

The most important date that Microsoft is focusing on is the day after Thanksgiving. If the Xbox isn't jammed in stores by then, the holiday season could be lost.

Launch Variable: THE MARKETING

The importance of launch marketing is debatable. On one hand, Sega built the Genesis into a household name with sly advertising. On the other hand, Sony launched the PS2 with the critically reviled PS9 campaign and still did great. So who can tell? What *is* sure is that without significant marketing the general public won't embrace a new console.

Xbox Launch Status

$500 million is a lot of cash and the Xbox certainly has the games. The only question now is whether Microsoft can convince the general public that the Xbox is "cool."

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Launch Variable: THE LAUNCH SOFTWARE

Four questions matter when you're talking about launch software. First of all, is there a good quantity of games? Do the games give hope for the future? Do the games deliver an experience you can't get on any other console? And finally, does the system have proven franchises?

Xbox Launch Status

The Xbox has the first questions answered. It has a lot of software titles, and there are a significant number of exceptional games right at launch (check out our reviews at the back of the magazine). Most importantly, games like *Halo* and *DoA3* simply couldn't be done on any other system, making the Xbox a true generational step above the competition. The big question is proven franchises. Our take on it is that the best new Xbox games are going to make the "proven franchises" look tired and old, while starting a new proven franchise of their own. Can you say *Halo 2*?

SQUIRREL MONKEYS IN SPACE: Gordo, a squirrel monkey, was the very first "US Ape-o-naut." He survived re-entry, but tragically died when the rocket's nose cone sank. Was this the very beginning of the Robot/Monkey Apocalypse? Perhaps.

¡YO QUIERO TACO BELL!: In the dog-eat-dog world of fast food, Dinky the lovable chihuahua was wearing Milk-Bone underwear. The former spokespooch was made redundant in 2000 after three years of dedicated service (that's 21 in dog years).

A bit of the old this and that

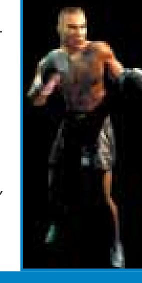
If it's important to the Xbox, we've got it here:

Resident Evil creeps elsewhere

The news:
Despite early hopes and many rumors, the wildly popular *Resident Evil* series will not make its way to the Xbox. Capcom has announced that it will re-create early versions of the series for the GameCube exclusively and follow them up with brand-new episodes of the series.
Why it's important:
The *Resident Evil* series is one of the most popular franchises in the history of videogames. Although the Xbox will be the home of the *Dino Crisis* series, *Resident Evil* would have been a valuable tool for breaking into the Japanese market.
The Official Xbox Magazine take:
Resident Evil has been selling in smaller and smaller numbers during the last few years. We'll miss it, but barring a serious redesign, *Resident Evil*'s best days are most likely behind it.

Codemasters signs on for four

The news:
Codemasters, producer of classics such as *Micro Machines* and *Colin McRae Rally*, has announced that it will fully back the Xbox with four games. The titles are *TOCA Race Driver*, *LMA Manager*, and *Mike Tyson Heavyweight Boxing*, with *Ultimate Blade of Darkness* – as an Xbox exclusive! – wrapping up the lineup.
Why it's important:
LMA Manager, which is a soccer-management simulation (kind of like fantasy football) and *TOCA* are *huge* in Europe, where the Xbox needs a substantial foothold. The gory *Blade of Darkness* and the *Mike Tyson* game add a dark action edge to the lineup.
The Official Xbox Magazine take:
It's great for Limeys, Krauts, and Frogs… we mean, our European friends.



Xbox bundle strategy explained

The news:
If you already have your Xbox while you're reading this magazine, you probably bought it through a pre-order bundle. Before the launch, many questioned some retailers' strategy of selling bundles costing up to $1,000 dollars. But in a recent phone call to Ed Fries, the VP of Microsoft's games division, he explained the plan. "Basically, we don't want retailers to pre-sell more than half of their units. We want people to be able to go to the store and buy an Xbox on the day of launch. That's very important to us. We did give incentives for participating in certain bundle programs, but in the end, the choice was up to each individual retailer."
Why it's important:
Even with the crazy bundle price tags, Toys "R" Us and other retailers sold out before launch.
The Official Xbox Magazine take:
We love the Xbox, but even we were scared by the $1,000 bundles. That being said, it'll be really nice to show up on Nov. 15 and get an Xbox.

GameCube disaster, or bad Xbox omen?

The news:
Nintendo's GameCube launch in Japan dropped well below expectations with early estimates stating that less than 60 percent of Nintendo's launch units (fewer than 300,000) sold during the first week. Particularly frightening were the launch software sales. Nintendo sold around one game per GameCube during that span. A normal console launch will see an average of two or three games per unit.
Why it's important:
There could be numerous reasons behind the botched launch, but three stand out. Lack of interest in the GameCube, distractions from the recent terrorist attacks, or a general reaction to a faltering global economy. If it's the third option, the Xbox may feel the sting as well.
The Official Xbox Magazine take:
We're just going to have to wait and see with this issue.

Hackers take aim at the Xbox

The news:
The Xbox is a games-only machine… right? Well, not if hackers have their say. Blokman Trading, a company in the Czech Republic, has already modified Linux to run on the Sony PlayStation, and others have done the same with Dreamcast and PS2. The Xbox, with its built-in hard-drive and broadband capability, is already a target of hackers who plan to wipe the system and install their own OS.
Why it's important:
Microsoft is determined to make sure the Xbox can't be hacked. "Bill Gates was the first one to bring up this issue," Ed Fries recently explained. "What exactly we did to make it difficult, I honestly don't know. Not many people on the planet know, but that's probably best."
The Official Xbox Magazine take:
Why would anyone *want* to turn the Xbox into a lame PC?

Robot/Monkey Apocalypse: Episode II The Phantom Monkey

It's when a serial killer goes postal and ices his co-workers that hindsight and hubris go hand-in hand. "I should have seen it coming," says a survivor. "He was a time bomb!" Which brings us to the second installment of Robot/Monkey Apocalypse, our monthly look at how a Robo-Simian Rampage will likely end the earth, oh, well, pretty soon now. The first sign of the impending apocalypse was possibly in Sega's *Michael Jackson's Moonwalker*, the seminal-popstar-inspired isometric 3D shooter.
Just a few feet from the very start of the game, Michael's chimp, Bubbles, appears. Collecting him causes Michael Jackson to mutate into a giant laser-spewing automaton. If that isn't a sign of a Robot/Monkey Apocalypse, then we don't know what is.

Under the Radar

The best Xbox games you haven't heard of

■ Rich, glorious colors really bring out that "fantasy novel cover" look. But this is realtime.

New game, you say? So what's it called?
Wrath.

Who's making it?
The Collective. The same guys who are currently finishing *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

What's the game about?
It's all about one-on-one fantasy-monster arena combat (OOOFMAC). And we're not talking about your traditional cutesy fantasy creatures like unicorns, nymphs, and Smurfs, we're talking about huge, hairy lizard beasts with fangs, claws, and other sharp objects protruding out of places where most videogame monsters don't even have places.

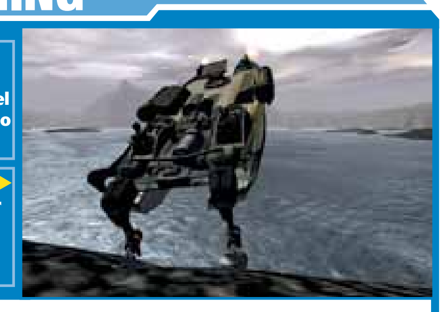
Why should we care?
The monster design already looks awesome and we've already seen what these guys can do with a tiny, huggable Sarah Michelle Gellar. So we anxiously await what they'll do when they're free to create some big time creatures. Plus, the concept art is out of this world.

Why haven't we heard of it yet?
The Collective is currently slaving away on *Buffy*, so that's the game that's in the forefront. Once it hits stores, expect to hear a lot more about *Wrath*.

THE IT THING



◀ *Wave Race* innovated both the look and feel of water in video games.



Blood Wake ▶ has "real" water physics and a photo-realistic appearance.

Hyper-realistic water

It's been five years since Nintendo changed the way we think about water with *Wave Race 64*, and for quite some time, no one has improved upon the original. Thanks to the Xbox, however, we are now seeing a flood of new games with amazing new water features.
Two Xbox graphics tricks make water look so good on this system – pixel shaders and vertex shaders. The Xbox was built from the ground up to handle complex surfaces with ease. You can see awesome water effects in *Halo*, *Munch's Oddysee*, *TransWorld Surf*, and even *Shrek*, but *Blood Wake* tops them all. This game features the most realistic-looking water we've ever seen in a game – and this is just a first-generation Xbox game. We can only imagine how wet things get from here.

Sega to use Xbox in arcades?



■ Currently you can find these at deserted malls across America.

Sega's arcade division will allegedly use Xbox technology as the basis for its NAOMI 3 coin-op technology, according to several Japanese news sources. Sega has commonly used "off-the-shelf" components in the past, including NEC's PowerVR graphics set, and the powerful Xbox technology would be a very compelling and cost-effective solution in an increasingly expensive business. Custom arcade hardware is cripplingly expensive, and the recent downturn in arcade profits reflects that.
Namco, Sega's biggest arcade rival in Japan, currently uses a system based on PlayStation2 technology. Any Xbox hardware used by Sega would likely include more RAM, and apparently it will only support HDTV monitors. The upside for Sega is a simple development environment, and the upside for Xbox owners would be accurate and quick coin-op conversions. At time of going to press, Sega still hadn't made an official announcement.



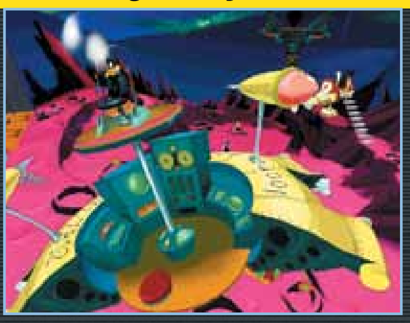
GameWatch

The quick dirt on 10 games you'll hear more about soon...



Max Payne

Projected release: Sometime 2002
The good stuff: *Max Payne* was a surprise hit on the PC earlier this year, but let's be honest – third-person shooters like this belong on a console. And no console can do this game better than the Xbox. We can't wait to see how good the "bullet-time" gunfire sequences look on the Xbox.
The scary stuff: We'll say it in bullet time: W-h-e-r-e a-r-e t-h-e m-u-l-t-i-p-l-a-y-e-r m-o-d-e-s?



Loons: The Fight for Fame

Projected release: Spring 2002
The good stuff: We love party games (just try to get ahold of us during one of our marathon *Fuzion Frenzy* days), and *Loons* is built for four-player mayhem. Plus, the classic Warner Bros. characters are a fresh break from the cliché-spouting faux-hip Gen-Zers in *Frenzy*.
The scary stuff: What's with all the "Fight for Fame" crap? Just give these characters some anvils and get the heck out of the way.

GameWatch



Gun Metal

Projected release: Spring 2002
The good stuff: As long as there are videogames, there will be videogames about giant robots who turn into vehicles. *Gun Metal* fulfills the Xbox's requirements for this game type with the typical, flashy graphics style of UK developer Rage.
The scary stuff: Do giant robots *really* need to transform into planes and cars to cause destruction? Can't they just step on stuff with their massive titanium boots?



Circus Maximus

Projected release: Spring 2002
The good stuff: After watching *Ben Hur* or *Gladiator*, who hasn't wanted to try their hand at a little chariot combat? If the this game is as fast, beautiful, and deep as Kodiak Interactive promises, we may all get our chance. Now we just have to decide whether to be the driver or the guy with the whip.
The scary stuff: We still haven't seen any screens of this game from the Xbox… they've all been taken from PC.

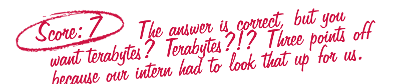
■ **HUBRIS-CAM:** After devoting several column inches last month making fun of Nintendo for missing its launch date in the US, we then found out that Xbox, too, would be a week late. Xbox is still not purple, though. So there.

■ **WELCOME TO THE FANTASY ZONE:** A certain editor from this magazine once got his coat caught in the hydraulics of a Sega *Space Harrier* coin-op. The resulting stumble as he exited the machine can only be described as historically hysterical.

10 Ridiculously *Tough Questions*

This month we grill Peter Molyneux, the famed creator of games such as* Populous, Syndicate, Dungeon Keeper, *and* Black and White. *He's also working on one of the most anticipated Xbox games in development – Project* Ego *(see page 54 for the full story on his latest).

1) True or False: The Xbox is the most powerful console out there.
T. The Xbox is a fantastic combination of great graphics capabilities, fast processor, a reasonable amount of memory (I don't think I could ever be satisfied with anything less than terabytes), and to cap it all, a hard-disk. We can make games that are visually stunning, create worlds that are more realistic than ever before, and the hard-disk will enable us to create types of games with persistent worlds that simply would not be possible on any other console.



2) True or False: *Project Ego* is an extension of themes you first began in *Populous*.
False-ish. What Big Blue Box has done is to be inspired by stuff they have seen at Lionhead and games that I and they have worked on together. The *Project Ego* world is persistent and has thousands of characters, and this originated in *Dungeon Keeper* and *Black and White*, but they have now taken this technology far beyond anything Lionhead or I have ever attempted.



We don't accept wishy-washy answers.

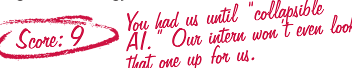
3) True or False: *Project Ego* will ship on time.
T. Providing we set the release a month before it comes out. I've always got release dates completely wrong but will now give you a release window: *Project Ego* will be released in 200?. (I should be safe with that one!)



(Because that's our bet for the other question mark.)

4) True or False: *Project Ego* will be a masterpiece conceptually, but it won't push technical boundaries.

F. I hesitate to declare that any game will be a masterpiece, but I do think *Project Ego* will push technical boundaries – character morphing, a linear branching story engine, a persistent world, and collapsible AI. All of these features are at the cutting edge of technology.



5) True or False: You were once locked in a cupboard by your employees at Bullfrog.
F. Although I am sure there were many times when they felt like doing this. I *was* expelled from junior school after being found naked in a cupboard at school with a girl called Susan, though.



Right answer... but not enough details.

6) True or False: You used this period of (naked) incarceration to come up with the plan for *Black and White*.
F. But it would have been great to have had a few spare quiet moments.



We value our quiet, naked moments in the closet above all else.

7) True or False: Online console gaming will never take off.
F. I think as more and more great console developers – particularly some of the legendary designers from Japan – have the ability to design online games, then I think we'll see some incredible designs.



Mmmm... Massively Multiplayer Metal Gear Solid... free 10s for everyone!

8) True or False: Japanese RPGs are trite, auto-cannibalizing, and need a massive overhaul.
True-ish. I think your words are a bit too strong, though. RPGs are the first games I ever played and still the ones I enjoy most. However, I have been frustrated by their limitations.



We warned you... that's another 5.

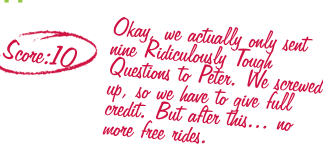
9) True or False: There is unlikely to be a WAP version of *Project Ego*.
T.



Sorry, Pete, we know you're close to Project Ego and all, but we heard some rumors on an Internet newsgroup... We'll wait and see.

10) If you think the Official Xbox Magazine is the best magazine you've ever read... then don't answer.

. . .



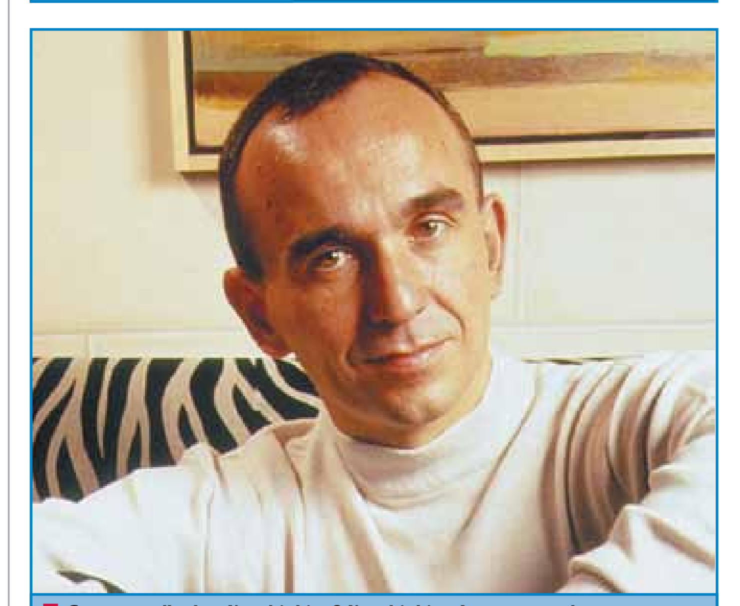
Final Grade: 70/100

C- Our second-highest score ever! Maybe we're going soft on our ridiculously tough grading...

Ridiculously Tough Hall of Fame

Lorne Lanning	71	Avg. Score 70.5
Peter Molyneux	70	

At this rate, even Miyamoto couldn't get a B.



■ Can you tell what I'm thinking? I'm thinking I want to seduce you on this zebra-print sofa. Seduce you with my eyes, and thoughtful gameplay.

ARMCHAIR GAMER

For guys who prefer their sports indoors

Baseball may be considered our national pastime, and football may be the most popular sport on our continent, but for those who live in the Deep South and for those in the Great White North, those two sports aren't even close to a top priority.

In the South, NASCAR is king. While those who live above the Mason-Dixon line have trouble grasping the intricacies of driving in repetitive counterclockwise circles, Southerners have embraced the finer points of the sport, such as drafting, teamwork, pit strategy, talking without teeth, and making sure your sponsor is happy.

Those from the North, on the other hand, consider hockey their own. Even though the sport has migrated in recent years from Canada to as far south as Florida, the sport is best loved in the home of Stan Mikita.

Thankfully, the Xbox has both bases covered. Here are the key competitors right now:

SOUTH



NASCAR Thunder 2002
DEVELOPER: **TIBURON**
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**

■ **WHAT'S GOOD:** *NASCAR Thunder 2002* is vastly improved over EA's disappointing PS2 version, which hit shelves last year. There are more cars, brilliant lighting effects, and most importantly, it's now being developed by the guys who have turned *Madden* into a masterpiece.
■ **WHAT'S BAD:** EA seems to be playing things close to the vest when it comes to making games for the PS2, the Xbox, and the GameCube. Why not take advantage of the more powerful Xbox hardware instead of programming for the lowest common denominator?
■ **SECRET WEAPON:** If you drive as badly as we do, it won't take long to notice the cool new realtime body-damage effect on the cars.
■ **DEEP SOUTH EQUIVALENT:** Tons of cars? Realistic body damage? Spinouts? …think "Wal-Mart parking lot on a Saturday afternoon."

■ NASCAR Thunder 2002

■ NASCAR Heat 2002





NASCAR Heat 2002
DEVELOPER: **HASBRO INTERACTIVE**
PUBLISHER: **INFOGRAMES**

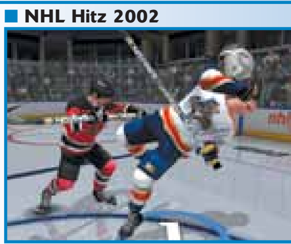
■ **WHAT'S GOOD:** First of all, *NASCAR Heat* looks great. But what's most important is that this title is unofficially the first Xbox network game. That means you'll be able to connect up to eight different TVs and Xbox units into one massive multiplayer race.
■ **WHAT'S BAD:** This game isn't as graphically impressive as *Thunder*, and it doesn't have as many cars on the screen at the same time. That being said, the game plays great (see review, page 101).
■ **SECRET WEAPON:** The "Race the Pro" option lets you challenge against the best runs raced by real pro drivers. Let's see how good they are behind a game pad instead of a steering wheel.
■ **DEEP SOUTH EQUIVALENT:** Eight people and eight TVs all tuned to the same thing at once? …think "Alabama government housing during Monday Night Raw." Government housing, just to be clear, means jail. Prison.

NORTH



■ NHL 2002

■ NHL Hitz 2002



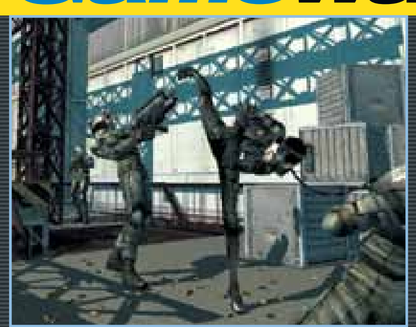
NHL 2002
DEVELOPER: **EA CANADA**
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**

■ **WHAT'S GOOD:** Right off the bat, those with sharp eyes will recognize that the Xbox version of *NHL 2002* looks even better than its PS2 counterpart. And the sluggish framerates that plagued last year's PS2 version are all but gone.
■ **WHAT'S BAD:** EA is keeping quiet about Xbox-exclusive goodies. The hard-drive could easily provide post-game highlight shows, online capabilities could be added, and space could be made for quick roster upgrades. Don't expect to see any of these, though.
■ **SECRET WEAPON:** EA is focusing on drama and storytelling in this edition. By tracking player stats and commenting on them, the game can make you feel like the star of the show.
■ **CANADIAN EQUIVALENT:** Moosehead – Canadians certainly know their beer, and this is an all-around favorite.

NHL Hitz 2002
DEVELOPER: **MIDWAY**
PUBLISHER: **MIDWAY**

■ **WHAT'S GOOD:** If you truly appreciate the finer points of hockey (like when Eric Lindros gets his face smeared across the glass by a surly defenseman), *Hitz* will appeal directly to you. Like *NBA Jam* before it, this title is designed to highlight the more visceral moments in hockey, while maintaining a much stronger sim element than its predecessors.
■ **WHAT'S BAD:** The snobby hockey elite will probably frown on the over-the-topness. As if a flaming hockey puck is going to hurt anyone.
■ **SECRET WEAPON:** Mini-games. Once you're bored with traditional hockey, this game will stretch your playing time with special mini-games taken from the official NHL super-skills competition. Also, the game is built for four-player gaming, and the Xbox conveniently has four controller ports.
■ **CANADIAN EQUIVALENT:** Molson – the guilty pleasure everyone likes, but no one will admit to.

GameWatch



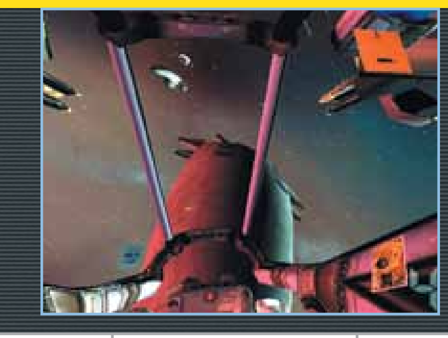
Strident
Projected release: Q2 2002
The good stuff: What do you get when you combine team combat from games like *Rainbow Six*, mix in a healthy dose of *Double Dragon*-style beat-'em-up gameplay, flavor with a dose of *Spider-Man* wall crawling, and top it all off with gorgeous graphics? – *Strident* à la mode.
The scary stuff: Mixing so many different styles of gameplay is a tall order. If it works, the game's brilliant, but if it doesn't....



Crash
Projected release: Q1 2002
The good stuff: There's a little something in all of us that loves to see a good crash. So that little something will be tickled pink by Rage's glossy new racer. At the heart of *Crash* is the ability to turn gorgeous 10,000+-polygon vehicles into smoking piles of junk metal... what more do you need?
The scary stuff: Namby-pamby car manufacturers won't license their cars out for this kind of game.



Gun Valkyrie
Projected release: February 2002
The good stuff: It's a gorgeous shooter that flat-out moves. It's got a typically weird Sega storyline and some decidedly cool "eleki-punk" character designs. (We don't really know what "eleki-punk" means, but we think it describes the guys who hang out in front of polling booths and hassle voters.)
The scary stuff: It's a new series for Sega... will it have the legs to last as a franchise?



Falcone: Enter the Maelstrom
Projected release: Spring 2002
The good stuff: Imagine a perfect cross between *Unreal Tournament* and *Colony Wars*, a game where you can not only zoom around in epic space battles, but board the ships pirate-style for a more conventional first-person-shooter experience. That's what *Falcone* is.
The scary stuff: It's called *Falcone: Enter the Maelstrom*, which is among the worst names ever.

■ **BETTER LATE THAN NEVER:** In typical Peter Molyneux fashion, his answers to the ten (err... nine) Ridiculously Tough Questions were about a week late. Luckily for him, we don't mark down game geniuses for handing in late papers.

■ **POSTER BOYS:** To graphically represent our brothers from above and below, we sensitively chose images that are symbolic of their respective cultures. After all, what says "the South" better than the General Lee or the "the North" better than the brothers McKenzie?

The Rumor Mole



Master of disguise
All-knowing Xbox insider
Blabber of secrets

Well, the Mole is back. I want you all to know that I'm working on an even better disguise. It seems that some people in the industry don't like their rumors spread all over the Official Xbox Magazine. So I'll probably have to do this one from even deeper undercover than usual. I've gathered the tastiest rumors and secrets surrounding the Xbox... and while they are *all* rumors, this month at least one of them is a stone-cold lock. You've just got to guess which one it is.

Can't handle the cold?

So by now it's probably no longer a rumor that Nintendo has canned the GameCube sequel to the snowboarding game that started it all. Well, didja know that the reason behind this was that the game couldn't quite match up to two Xbox snowboarding games – EA's *SSX Tricky* and Microsoft's own *Amped*? Seems as if the big N is a little afraid of some direct competition.

Could a Blizzard be coming?

Quick, name one company that makes "must have" games every single year without fail? If you said Blizzard, you are right on the money (except for the "every year" part – they always have trouble with deadlines). Rumor has it that the people behind a certain console that starts with the letter *X* are in talks to bring the powerhouse PC developer onboard with at least three exclusive titles. A completely revamped and stunningly rendered in 3D *Diablo*, anyone? Just a thought.

The Matrix engine?

A while back, the Mole got a glimpse of a game that was so damned impressive he had to pick his cleverly disguised jaw up off the floor. The game in question – *Bloodlust* (tentative name) – features a half-vampire, half-human hottie who bounces around dark (not to mention splendidly rendered) city streets like something straight out of *The Matrix* – so much so that rumors have been flying that Shiny wants to get ahold of this game engine and use it for the much-anticipated *Matrix* game. However, Shiny has always been known for developing its own technology, and *Bloodlust* is being shopped around to many different publishers, with Interplay certainly not being the wealthiest shopper. But you never know, it could happen.

2D fighters, rejoice!

The Mole just doesn't understand all the excitement about 2D fighters, but I've got to admit they've got a huge following. So, you 2D fighting fans will probably go nuts when I tell you that I've heard that Capcom is planning to release an Xbox version of its weirdly popular *Capcom vs. SNK* series. The Mole prefers 3D, but what are you gonna do.

Hawking the Xbox

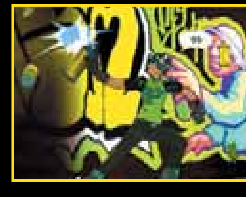
Tony Hawk 3 is making its way to the PS2, but the Mole hears that Microsoft is negotiating with Activision to ensure a super-special *THPS3* only for Xbox. Aww yeah.

Trendspotter

Each month we take a look at the cutting-edge trends that make up the Xbox game world. Our society is beset by disturbing trends such as mesh T-shirts, acid-wash jeans, and pants that buckle around the thigh – and the world inside the Xbox is sometimes just as unfortunate.

This month's trend is PETTY CRIME. It used to be that videogame society was safe from petty crime. Sure, there were hyper-violent felons, drug dealers, and arsonists of every sort in the average game, but petty crime... well, that was neglected by even the most heinous game villain. On the Xbox, however, petty crime is all over the place, and it's not the villains who are committing these misdemeanors – it's the stars of the game! It wouldn't be like this if Steve McQueen was still alive. Anyway, here are the worst offenders:

Crime: Vandalism



Game: *Jet Set Radio Future*

Punishment: Community service repainting bland textures in PS2 games

Crime: Public drunkenness



Game: *DoA3*

Punishment: Forced to share room with the "angry" Backstreet Boy during rehab

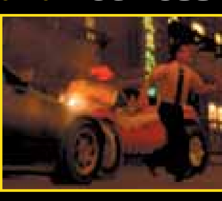
Crime: Leash law violations



Game: *Mad Dash*

Punishment: Sent to an animal shelter with cast of *Running Wild*

Crime: Reckless endangerment



Game: *Wreckless*

Punishment: Forced to add "W" to game title

GameWatch



MX 2002 Featuring Ricky Carmichael

Projected release: November 2001

The good stuff: Although, for the most part, this is a direct port of the PS2 version of *MX2002*, a few new features have been added. Two new tracks, motorcycle-tuning features, and a two-player version of Horse round out the title nicely.

The scary stuff: The graphics haven't been updated thus far, and the low-resolution PS2 textures look bad when rendered cleanly by the Xbox.



Test Drive

Projected release: November 2001

The good stuff: Yes, *Test Drive* is coming to multiple platforms, but no, it won't look quite as picture-perfect on anything but the Xbox. Incredible reflection-mapping means you can see the silky sunlight reflect off of all sides of the car, and pixel shading allows Xbox-exclusive effects like swaying trees and the illusion of moving water.

The scary stuff: Does this time-tested classic (i.e., really old) still have what it takes to compete?

ACTUAL MISDEMEANORS: In Kentucky, you must remove your hat if you come face-to-face with a cow on the road. In Arizona, there is a "veggie hate crimes act" that makes disparaging its produce a crime. Believe it or not, these are REAL laws.

Dead or Alive 3

THE NEW FACE OF FIGHTING GAMES

Ever since fighting games made the jump into 3D, *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter* have defined the fighting genre. And while the *DoA* series has steadily improved with each version, it has always been viewed as "that good fighting game with bouncy boobs." With *DoA3*, Tecmo is set to change all of that.

■ Use lens flare to distract an opponent...

■ ...or catch him unawares on the beach...



■ ...and do more than kick sand in his face.

■ I think he got the message.

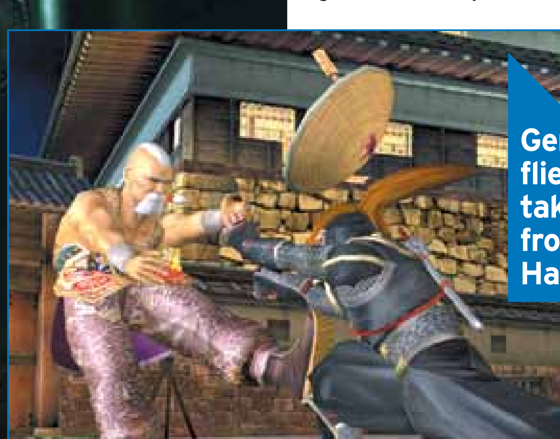
The game's improvements are a curious mix of subtle and extreme, and while the technological feats are obvious, the gameplay cues are more subtle. In some ways, it has become the sum of its parts, building on an existing framework and boosting the basic feature set. But in other ways, it has blossomed into more than the sum of its parts, with improved control and tweaked combos that turn it into a faster, smoother, and more liquid experience than either *Tekken* or *Virtua Fighter*.

THE BIG PICTURE

Innovation comes in many forms, and one of its most-overlooked elements is the final presentation of a game. Of course, all games have to look great on any TV or audio set-up, but the games that are really going to drive the industry forward are those that focus on the big picture. And by big picture we mean a big, colorful TV. Although *DoA3* looks absolutely astonishing on any TV, it can be best appreciated on a high-end set-up with a wide-screen HDTV and Dolby 5:1 sound. The game supports all of these features superbly. On an HDTV, running at the selectable 480 (non-interlaced) vertical resolution, the game looks simply breathtaking. It looks almost *fake*. The option has to be selected on both the Xbox preferences and during *DoA3* itself.

Even the forgotten, oft-ignored sound has been given the full treatment. Dolby Digital sound is fully implemented, and although it's noticeable throughout, during the "Pancratium" level, a howling sandstorm makes for a quite unsettling aural adventure. The same can be said of the beach level, where the gentle lap of waves follows the ever-roaming camera in perfect harmony.

As Xbox games improve in quality and move away from the port mentality often displayed during a system's launch phase, we'll see high-end audio and video features become much more intrinsic parts of gameplay. These aren't the type of additions or features that make a game great – they are simply the extras that make a great game revolutionary.



Gen Fu's hat flies off as he takes a hit from Ninja Hayabusa.

THE OLD FACE OF FIGHTING GAMES

Tecmo's coin-op was a bit hard to find in US arcades (although it enjoyed some success in Japan), but the home conversions of the *DoA* games were all big hits.



DEAD OR ALIVE
Tecmo surprised many with its overtly sexy, yet brilliantly playable, PlayStation fighting game.



DoA2
Dreamcast owners reaped the benefits of Tecmo's staggering improvements over the original *DoA*...



DoA2: HARDCORE
...But PS2 owners had the last laugh when it was ported, with extras, to PS2.

■ **DEAD OR ALIVE OR CALLED FOR ROUGHING THE PASSER?:** Itagaki's first-ever videogame project was the final version of cult football hit *Tecmo Bowl*.

FINISHING THE STORY

One thing that *DoA* seemed to be missing previously was the inclusion of those compelling, occasionally senseless, and yet totally addictive end-of-game rendered movies. Team Ninja agreed, and so *DoA3* has finally embraced them. Now, when you beat the game with a character, you get to see a movie that explains his or her motivation in usually dramatic, and always-impressive, ways.

The team was too busy to actually implement the movies, so they simply created storyboards and plots, then farmed the process out. The result is stunning – just distinct enough in style to differentiate the look and feel of the almost movie-like gameplay, but definitely retaining the character of the *DoA* world. We don't want to spoil the plots for you, but some characters advance their prior storylines, while others, including Gen Fu, finally find some closure. Others, like Bass, open up brand-new mysteries.

SINGLE PLATFORM = BETTER GAME

DoA3 is a prime example of why focusing on one system is the only way to redefine a genre. Rather than program for PS2, GameCube, and Xbox, Team Ninja concentrated on Xbox only. While financially that doesn't make much sense (more games sold = more money made), artistically it is the only way to make a mark.



Eat nature, mutha!
DoA's use of natural environments is unparalleled. Much has been made of the forest level, with its falling leaves and babbling brook, but there are more to see, including an amazing sandstorm, an undersea palace, and our favorite, the snowy creek.

Gen teaches Jann a lesson in respect for elders – but headbutting folks in the crotch is not safe at any age.

Where characters step or fall, the powdery snow is crushed flat.

Snow is also loosened from tree branches, falling in clumps.

Perhaps no other game on the Xbox (with the possible exception of *Halo*) so clearly demonstrates the awesome power of Microsoft's little black box. The graphics are so smooth, crisp, and lifelike that they immediately make your average arcade look like a collection of Sega Saturn games. Whether it's leaves blowing in the wind, ice shattering into hundreds of perfectly rendered shards, or just the stunningly smooth animation of each and every move in the game, there is no denying that *DoA3* has forever raised the bar on fighting games. Itagaki and his team have earned a permanent place inside every game developer's playtest (*cough* – steal ideas – *cough*) lab. In this industry, imitation is definitely the highest form of flattery.

PERFECTING THE GAME

We're not going to sit here and tell you that *DoA3* completely re-invented the fighting genre. In fact, nearly every element of this game has been seen in other fighting games. However, no game has ever come close to so perfectly combining all of it into one cohesive and jaw-droppingly impressive package.

Never has there been a fighting game which so fluidly dropped gamers into a truly alive 3D world. The usual constraints of a 2D genre slowly moving into the third dimension are almost completely gone, and the once pre-rendered and mostly insignificant back-grounds of the past have been replaced with unbelievably real and reactive environments. It no longer feels like a couple of polygonal characters in a game – it now feels like you are actually fighting in the real world. The key to this feel is animation and collision detection so believable you are likely to forget what you are watching onscreen is just a game.

Put simply, *DoA3* is the absolute pinnacle of fighting games, and we're damn happy to say it is ONLY ON XBOX!

WOULD YOU LIKE FETA WITH THAT?: The oddly named "Pancratium" level in *DoA3* is named after the earliest formalized martial art, a mixture of boxing and wrestling developed in ancient Greece.



Smashing an opponent into an object increases damage.

Interactive environs
Using the environment to your advantage isn't simply a gimmick, it's an intrinsic part of the gameplay and something that's been increased in scope for *DoA3*.

Oftentimes, objects such as this ice formation are destroyed on impact, but there are solid obstacles, too.

Once the ice is good and smashed up, the arena becomes less claustrophobic, which completely changes the strategy for the arena.

CHARACTER PROFILES

Kasumi
Japanese female
Fighting styles: Mugen Tenshin Style Ninjutsu Tenjin Mon
Occupation: Runaway shinobi
Likes: Strawberry millefeuille
Hobbies: Fortune telling

A kunoichi (female ninja) who was ordained as leader of the "Mugen Tenshin" style. Instead, she became a "runaway shinobi" so that she might avenge of her older brother, Hayate. She finally met her long-lost brother in the last tournament.

Ryu Hayabusa
Japanese male
Fighting styles: Hayabusa Style Ninjutsu
Occupation: Owner of curio shop
Likes: Sushi
Hobbies: Mt. climbing, fishing

Ryu, the modern super ninja, is the best friend of Kasumi's brother Hayate. In the last tournament, he successfully brought down Bankotsu-bo – the feared Tengu of Destruction (weird Santa-lookin' dude) – who had brought chaos to the whole world.

Hitomi
German female
Fighting style: Karate
Occupation: High school student
Likes: Sachertorte (German chocolate cake)
Hobbies: Cooking

Hitomi is the daughter of a Japanese mother and a German karate master. She has been practicing karate under her father's tutelage since she was just a child. She has always wanted to fight in *DoA* in order to test her formidable skills against the real world.

Zack
American male
Fighting style: Thai style boxing
Occupation: DJ
Likes: Ice cream
Hobbies: Billiards

This funky dude, with his self-taught Muay Thai, is back in *DoA*. One day, after using up all of his prize money from the last tournament, Zack realizes he has a problem. He's forgotten to do what he always wanted to do – enjoy the many luxuries of a vacation.

Gen Fu
Chinese male
Fighting style: Xynyi Liuhe Quan
Occupation: Bookstore owner
Likes: Mabo Dofu
Hobbies: Painting

Gen Fu fought in *DoA* to obtain the money needed to cure his sick granddaughter May Lin, who was suffering the ravages of a rare disease. May Lin, thanks to the prize money, now grows better and better every day. One last surgery, however, is needed in order to cure her.

Brad Wong
Chinese male
Fighting style: Zui Ba Xian Quan
Occupation: Bohemian
Likes: Drinking
Hobbies: Game of Go, Chinese fiddle

One day, the old master Chen, great teacher of Zui Ba Xian Quan, says, "Bring me the legendary drink. The name is 'Genra.'" What is Genra? It seems like a riddle. So it is that Brad Wong begins his journey in search of the mysterious Genra.

Tina Armstrong
American female
Fighting style: Pro wrestling
Occupation: Pro wrestler
Likes: Seafood
Hobbies: Cycling, videogames

Tina is a superstar in the world of women's wrestling, and the only daughter of the professional wrestler Bass. She is a woman of boundless ambition who thirsts for even greater fame and celebrity. Recently, she finally made her debut as a model.

Bass Armstrong
American male
Fighting style: Pro wrestling
Occupation: Pro wrestler
Likes: Sautéed chicken
Hobbies: Motorcycles

An undefeated bad guy professional wrestler. Although Bass has already retired from his job, he fights to stop his daughter Tina from winning the tournament. Bass loves his daughter very much but wants Tina to become a professional wrestler like her daddy.

THEY CALL ALL OF US BRUCE: At time of going to press, there were, like, more than seven hundred fake Bruce Lees available for rent at Blockbuster, including Bruce Li, Bruce Le, Truce Lee, and Brucilla Lee, the girl version.

Face-off

Since we had to go to Japan to review the game (Mr. Itagaki is famously and rightfully protective of his baby), we decided to use the opportunity to test *DoA3* against two other games we were very much looking forward to: namely, *Virtua Fighter 4* and *Tekken 4*. How did it compare, blow for blow, with these two arcade giants from Sega and Namco respectively?

To the right, our objective appraisal:

Graphics

1st DEAD OR ALIVE 3
Handily beats the brand-new *arcade* versions of *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter* with more beautiful environments, smoother animation, and basically much better characters. *Virtua* comes closest in this regard.

2nd VIRTUA FIGHTER 4
A very pretty game, and indeed, some of the level backgrounds come close in quality to *DoA*'s, although they tend to be much smaller. Character art and animation is a little inconsistent, however.

3rd TEKKEN 4
Some levels, like the steam-filled industrial zone, are inspired, while others, like the marble lobby, basically suck. Characters look almost exactly like those seen in *Tekken Tag Tournament* – with newer costumes.

Innovation

1st DEAD OR ALIVE 3
To be fair, *DoA3* comes in first place because the other two games have done practically nothing really new. Improved Tag battles and interactive 3D environments are the biggest changes here.

2nd TEKKEN 4
The tag system is dropped, and in comes a vaguely interactive environment. Walls now hem the fighting arena, and they affect the battle much as the walls in *DoA* – only they never break.

3rd VIRTUA FIGHTER 4
New characters and moves are pretty much the only real innovations, although fighting in 3D is now a good deal more logical and fluid.

Control

1st DEAD OR ALIVE 3
Yup. It's a clean sweep in the made-up-at-the-last-minute boxout awards. Tecmo's fighter is slick, intuitive, and above all, fun. Itagaki's claim that it was both easy and deep holds true.

2nd TEKKEN
For all its faults, this is still a stunning fighting game with quick response and lightning moves. Yes, you can also pull off Rain Man-style button combos for glam multi-part moves.

3rd VIRTUA FIGHTER
With the emphasis still on a hopeless attempt at "realism," *Virtua Fighter* is starting to show its age – but in this otherwise flashy group, that could be construed as wisdom. But it has to be said, *Virtua*, *Tekken* and *DoA* make a pretty amazing top tier of fighting games.

A rare picture of Tomonobu Itagaki using a US Xbox controller.

CHARACTER PROFILES



Leon
Italian male
Fighting style: Russian Martial Arts
Occupation: Mercenary
Likes: Pizza
Hobbies: Gardening

Rolande, a woman thief of the Silk Road, died saying, "The man I love is the strongest man in the world." So, in order to justify his long-lost lover's lamented last words, Leon entered the last *DoA*, only to be defeated. Memories of Rolande still return to haunt him.



Bayman
Russian male
Fighting style: Russian Martial Arts
Occupation: Assassin
Likes: Beef stew
Hobbies: Chess

This professional assassin acquired his commando-style martial arts in the military. Donovan, who once requested the task of assassinating Fame Douglas, had sent a sniper to dispose of Bayman. But Bayman easily disposes of the sniper.

Jann Lee
Chinese male
Fighting style: Jeet Kune Do
Occupation: Bouncer
Likes: Hamburger
Hobbies: Watching action movies

The fighter without a cause, Jann Lee, still walks a lonely path. Though the reputation of Jann Lee – the Dragon, as he is called – is universal, his search for a stronger foe does not end. His presence is still prominent in *DoA*, and his battle cry can still be heard.

Leifang
Chinese female
Fighting style: T'ai Chi Quan
Occupation: College student
Likes: Chinese dessert
Hobbies: Aromatherapy

Leifang is known to many as the young genius of T'ai Chi Quan. Ever since Jann Lee saved her from thugs, she has entered *DoA* to test her skills against his. Jann has shown his superior skills in the last two tournaments, but Leifang won't let that stop her.

Christie
English female
Fighting style: She Quan
Occupation: Assassin
Likes: Tomato juice
Hobbies: Driving

With all the traits required for an assassin, this cold-blooded woman has undergone the ultimate adaptation. She excels in the art of She Quan, which she employs to the fullest in her work. Christie has been hired by Donovan, a lieutenant of DOATEC.



Helena
French female
Fighting style: Pi Qua Quan
Occupation: Opera singer
Likes: Blancmange
Hobbies: Walk

This fighter is the illegitimate daughter of Fame Douglas, leader of DOATEC, and his mistress. With no regard to her wishes, she is dragged into the intertwined conspiracies within the DOATEC organization as the only living relative of Douglas.

Hayate
Japanese male
Fighting styles: Mugen Tenshin Style Ninjutsu Tenjin Mon
Occupation: Ninja
Likes: Sushi, sukiyaki
Hobbies: Iaido, Zen

Hayate is the brother of Kasumi and also the 18th leader of the "Mugen Tenshin" style. He was the subject of DOATEC's experimental superhuman project (Project Epsilon), in which he lost his memory. But in the last tournament he recovered his memory.

Ayane
Japanese female
Fighting styles: Mugen Tenshin Style Ninjutsu Hajin Mon
Occupation: Ninja
Likes: Marrons glaces
Hobbies: Beauty treatment

Ayane's former teacher and foster parent, the leader of Mugen Tensin style Hajin Mon, has disappeared. His name is Genra. Ayane, now the most powerful Shinobi in Hajin Mon, learns that he has been turned into a puppet by DOATEC and its evil Omega Project.

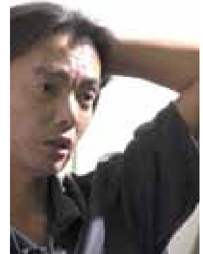


WIDER IS BETTER: Although the Japanese version of the Xbox controller fits some hands better, the location of the start and select buttons, to the left of the unit, means it's easy to hit "pause" accidentally if you have big thumbs.

Face to face with TOMONOBU ITAGAKI

Executive Officer & General Manager
Creative Division, Tecmo Ltd.





"All areas of the game benefit from Xbox technology. It's powerful enough to handle everything at once."

Us: ***First off, what has changed in Dead or Alive 3 from previous iterations of the game?***
Him: In the first place, it's two years later and most of what has changed is my feeling towards it. I wanted to make a fighting game that anyone can enjoy. I've tried to make a game that has a lot of reaction, and yet a game that is very fair and balanced. There is also a great deal of strategy added. You can have a game that features a lot of beautiful action, but a game that is also very easy for anyone to play. So it is easy, but it is also very deep.

Us: ***Tell us a little about the Tag Battle System.***
Him: Well, Team Ninja created Tag Battle in 1999 – so we were the first. So this is a very interesting feature in *Dead or Alive 3*. You can see a lot of improvement – and we have improved the quality a lot. In *Dead or Alive 2 Hardcore*, the Tag Battle system was really for hardcore gamers. In *Dead or Alive 3*, we really wanted to make it easier and more accessible to casual players. I think we have done that this time.

Us: ***When did Tecmo decide to go with Xbox for DoA3?***
Him: Not until January of 2001. We made the decision to go with Xbox after a long research study.

Us: ***How have you found the technology during this process?***
Him: The Xbox hardware is excellent to work with. It's powerful rather than easy. All areas of the game benefit from the Xbox technology. It is powerful enough to handle everything at once. In terms of power, the Xbox seems approximately three to five times more powerful than the PlayStation2. It would be possible to create the snow level we've done on the PS2, but not with the other things, characters, environment motion. It would be impossible to have all those things with the PS2 machine power.

Us: ***Do you think that PS2 is starting to look dated?***
Him: Yes. The PlayStation2 already belongs to another [previous] generation.

Us: ***What types of environmental effects has the Xbox enabled you to achieve?***
Him: Well, even with a very short time to go, we're still trying to make improvements. The water on the beach level will, we hope, accurately express wave movements and splashing during fights. We will also implement some refraction and diffraction. In the Pancratium level, you can see already the sand blowing in the wind, but this will become a full sandstorm. You can really hear the Dolby Digital effect in that level.

"The Xbox seems [about] three to five times more powerful than the PS2."

Us: ***What kind of research did you do for the environments?***
Him: Well, about 50% of the research came from the teams' previous personal experience. We also looked at a lot of visual reference material, books and video. The rest of it came from going on my own to such locations.

Us: ***What have you done to utilize the Xbox's other features, like hard-drive and broadband adapter?***
Him: We utilize the hard-drive already, to make game loading faster. We wanted to have game loading be almost instantaneous. So it gives us much quicker loading times. *DoA3*'s engine and the Xbox both have the ability to handle huge volumes of data simultaneously.

It is possible that the game can support LAN, but that is not a [priority].

Us: ***Tell us a little about your next project.***
Him: Team Ninja, after *DoA3*, will continue work on *Ninja Gaiden*. Some of them are already working on it. We want to create a game that will let you do many of the things you could do in the original. So yes, you can hang and swing around on posts, and the character can climb walls. But the game will be much more advanced than the original. The game engine for *Ninja Gaiden* is already 60% complete, but a lot of work has to be done on graphics.

Us: ***Will this game be available for Xbox?***
Him: That is a decision that will be made by my boss!

Us: ***So can we expect it to look better than Dead or Alive 3?***
Him: That depends on which machine we make it for! I should waive further comment on that.

GAIDEN IS COMING!

So where does it go from here? At time of going to press, Tecmo's president and other folks will be making decisions regarding the future of *Ninja Gaiden*, Tecmo's most famous franchise prior to the *Dead or Alive* opus. It's clear from talking to Mr. Itagaki that he wants it to be on Xbox, or at least that he wants to continue down the path he started with *Dead or Alive 3*.

Ninja Gaiden, for those who don't remember it, was a seminal and occasionally ground-breaking arcade romp that featured scrolling beat-'em-up action (including throws and grabs!) and more importantly, it had a huge emphasis on interacting with environments. Your ninja hero could leap deftly into the air, grab a street sign and swing around it to kick marauding bad guys as they attacked. Itagaki promises to bring all those retro moments back, but in a fully realized 3D environment, probably better than that seen in *DoA3*.

Right now, the game's future and its choice of platform is mired in the political process that only appears when a must-have game is on the horizon.

■ **EURO-NINJA:** The reason many European game fans have never heard of *Ninja Gaiden* is that in many territories, the game was called *Shadow Warriors*.

DEVELOPER: Tecmo | PUBLISHER: Tecmo | MULTIPLAYER: 1-4 | WEBSITE: www.tecmoinc.com

DEAD OR ALIVE 3

The best fighting game ever made!

Official Xbox magazine XBOX ELITE Award for Excellence

From a cult fighting game whose major attraction was its jiggling mammary quotient, the *Dead or Alive* series has grown and evolved into something much more impressive, and arguably more enjoyable, than mere boobs. (Hey, we did say *arguably*.) And in its latest evolution, *Dead or Alive 3* on the Xbox will not only change the way you view fighting games, but what you should expect from videogames, period. *DoA3* really will change the face of fighting.

The fighting system, which consists of a seemingly simple combination of kick, punch, guard, and counter, is more complex, with more moves and combos than seen in prior *DoA* titles. More importantly, the control feels smoother and more intuitive, and it's certainly quicker to respond. The game has been balanced so that there are never "dead" moments where two fighters are simultaneously performing moves that cancel each other out. Everything has cause and effect.

Most levels feature an old *DoA* trick – the ability to smash through barriers and fall onto and into other parts of the level. One example is the Japanese castle – a seemingly confined, yet beautiful, castle room with a black, reflective lacquered floor – but smash an opponent through one of the shoji screens and the battle continues on the sloped, tiled roof of the castle. Teeter too far to the edge and you'll fall into a torch-lit courtyard where the battle continues as embers spark and float into the night sky. It's the scope and variety of levels that makes *DoA* something markedly different in the fighting arena.

The 3D environments are obviously pretty, but they're also very much a part of the action. It becomes not only possible, but also essential, that you occasionally counter a strike and swing your opponent into a tree or even a burning torch to knock them out. Most levels also feature varying heights of terrain, à la *VF3*, and it means that the switch between levels becomes far more than simple aesthetics. Some levels are harder to fight on than others.

And this is where the distinction becomes obvious, even to fans of other genres. The impetus in most fighting games is to knock out your opponent as quickly as possible and get to the next level. Here, the impetus is to get to, see, and actually explore the next level – more like *Mario* than *Mortal Kombat*. And the exploration isn't simply visual. Each new level has true 3D features to exploit and use in combat, either defensively or offensively, and while elements of this can be seen in other fighting games, none handle the idea with such intuition and panache. And although the feature was touched on in *DoA2*, here it's fully realized and absolutely essential to the look and feel of the game.

The new characters are a varied bunch, and surprisingly (or at least, comparatively) well defined. One of our favorites is a fighter whose alternate costume reveals him as a Russian secret service commando, complete with a huge and intimidating combat knife strapped to his chest. Don't worry, though, he fights bare-fisted. Christie, who so gracefully adorns our cover, is a balletic mistress of kung fu. Her graceful style is smooth and liquid, making her an immediate favorite. It doesn't hurt that she's totally hot, either. Old favorites have, of course, been jazzed up with new moves and outfits. And yes, there will be more than enough hidden goodies for you to discover – including the mysterious and flaming "Genra."

If the game falls short in any area, it's in one that's endemic to the genre – anemic plot and character description – but there's an unavoidable reason. Each character has the opportunity and ability to win. To give each a reasoned, well-thought-out storyline would be pushing the boundaries of credibility, but the end movies do, in fact, advance the *DoA* universe, albeit in a typically obtuse fashion.

But like a supermodel with a PhD, it's occasionally easy to forget that this game is smarter than it is pretty. So disarmingly attractive are the levels that you'll find yourself booting it up to show off your Xbox to pals, or even simply to watch these epic environments unfold on screen. But play it, and play it a lot, because the fighting system and the terrifically expansive selection of game modes and options



SINGLE BATTLE STAGES

1. Lorelei
2. Tao
3. DOATEC HK
4. Lost World
5. Ice cave
6. Beach
7. Forest
8. Azuchi
9. Snow

Tag battle stages

1. Iron Hell
2. Pancratium
3. Aqua Palace
4. Danger Zone
5. X Octagon

Modus operandi

Game modes are encyclopedic. Most outstanding is a fully realized Tag mode – almost a game in its own right. Tag in an alternate whenever you are in trouble to literally double your strategic alternatives. Itagaki was quite insistent that this feature be fleshed-out and improved. In pace, it plays quite differently than other modes.

Time Attack, Survival, and a useful and detailed Practice mode are returning favorites, and the brilliant five-member Team Battle almost, but not quite, rounds things up. There's a stunning Watch mode, where you can have AI opponents duke it out to spectacular effect, complete with wacky camera angles and slow-mo moments. This sounds like a cute extra, but it's absorbing. Watching the Xbox "do it right" and with stunning directorial flair is utterly hypnotic.

STORY MODE
Yup, fight the other guys, get to the end, and open up some of the secrets.

TIME ATTACK (option to choose single or tag battle)
You can play Time Attack mode (against the clock) in regular or Tag Battle mode.

SURVIVAL
Just keep fighting as long as you can. Harder than it sounds.

TAG BATTLE
A lot of effort has gone into tuning and balancing this mode. Pick two fighters and switch between them, health bar permitting, of course.

TEAM BATTLE
One of the best modes in *Tekken* is fully fleshed out in *DoA3*; choose your five faves and duke it out.

VERSUS
A quick two-player match in Tag or regular mode.

WATCH
A strangely satisfying chance to watch computer AI kick butt.

PRACTICE
No penalties or death – just a big chance to try combos and throws, unhindered.

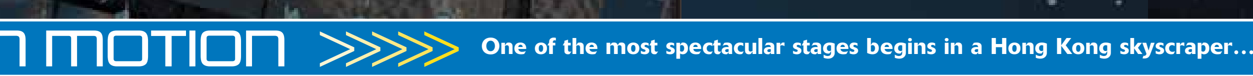
MOVIE THEATER
If you've opened end-of-game movies, watch them at your leisure here.

LOST HORIZONS: The Lost World stage in *Dead or Alive 3* is not only the largest physically, but the only stage that was created without either visual reference materials or a trip to an actual location.

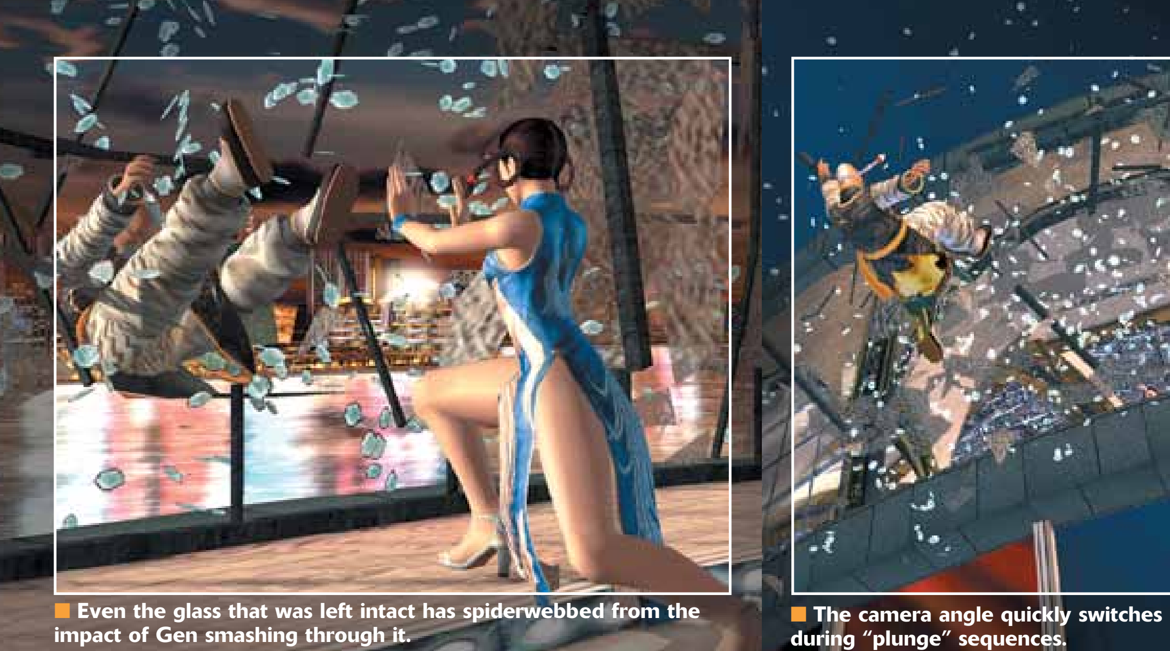
Fall guys

Most levels feature multi-tiered combat, allowing players to smash each other through various levels, often falling from ridiculous heights. The initially pretty, but hardly gasp-worthy, castle level reveals its charms only after you smash through a secret panel….

…then, the battle continues on the tiled rooftops until somebody loses their footing… at which point they fall into the courtyard, where breakable objects, such as flaming torches, litter the arena.



One of the most spectacular stages begins in a Hong Kong skyscraper…



Even the glass that was left intact has spiderwebbed from the impact of Gen smashing through it.

The camera angle quickly switches during "plunge" sequences.

Luckily Gen's fall is broken by the red-hot, razor-sharp neon signage.

And Gen gets an "owie" that no Band-Aid is going to help.

I AM NOT SANTA: The weird Santa-lookin' dude from *DoA2* is in fact a Tengu, a mythical Japanese forest-demon. Specifically, he's a Konsha Tengu (big-nosed Tengu) and looks a lot like their king, Sojobo, who reputedly carried a seven-feathered fan.



■ These clothes show off some of the slickly rendered and convincing fabric textures that make alternate costumes valuable, unlockable eye-candy.

make this a labyrinthine gameplay experience, with novelty and subtlety you'll be discovering for months to come.

Describing how good *DoA3* is, and how much better it is than the games that have preceded it, is a difficult task indeed. What's easy, however, is proclaiming that *Dead or Alive 3* is quite simply the best fighting game ever made – and quite possibly the single best-looking videogame of any kind, ever. If for some ridiculous reason you hadn't previously made up your mind whether or not to buy an Xbox, then relax. The decision's just been made for you. You're basically three hundred big ones in the hole as you finish reading this. Between *DoA3* and *Halo* (page 84), it is finally possible to witness the power and possibilities of Xbox.

– Frank O'Connor



ON THE GAME DISC

Movie

Check out the boys and girls of *Dead or Alive 3* in motion on our disc, as a video demo shows off some of the levels, including the amazing snow and forest stages.

THE VERDICT

Graphics
Life-changing, genre-defining, generation-busting perfection. And this is Tecmo's first attempt on the Xbox…

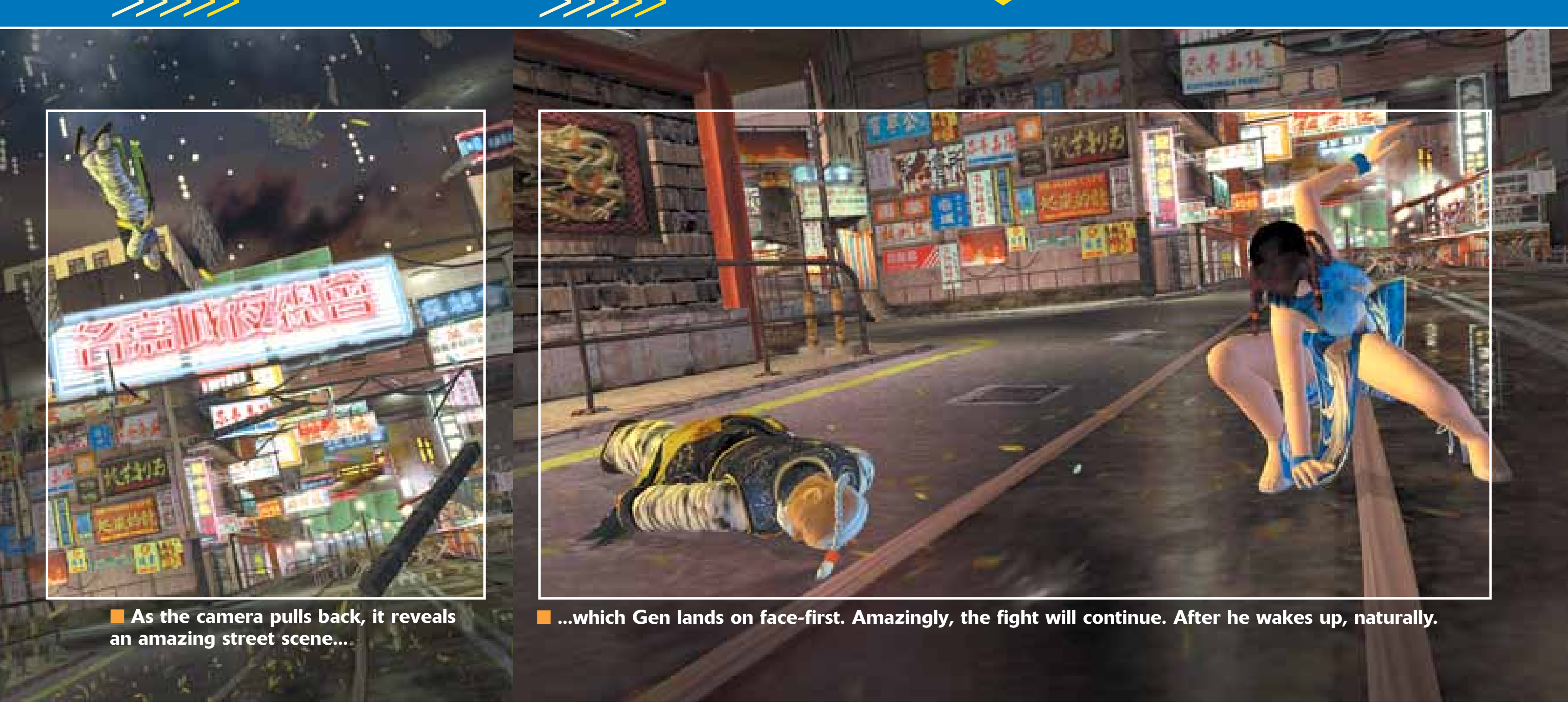
Immersion
The smoothly improved fighting system and the impossibly convincing environments combine to drag you into their world.

Sound
The only feature on the game that isn't revolutionary. Perfect samples and very Japanese tunes do the trick, though.

Design
Itagaki and his team have painted a fading genre vibrant once more, with clever design and the coolest blend of tech and art to date.

GOOD (+), BAD (–), PERPLEXING (?)
+ If you can see these screens, you can understand.
+ A brilliantly implemented, crisply crafted, and truly 3D fighting system.
+ Fighting environments so perfect, they're distracting.
+ Uses all Xbox faculties, HDTV, Dolby 5:1, etc.
– Well, there's that one tune we don't like…
– Character designs not as polished as their implementation.

Official Xbox magazine verdict 9.5 / 10.0



■ As the camera pulls back, it reveals an amazing street scene…

■ …which Gen lands on face-first. Amazingly, the fight will continue. After he wakes up, naturally.

■ **RUN LIKE HELL:** Fans of *Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore* will recognize the Iron Hell stage. Team Ninja resurrected the level deliberately to show how much better it looks on the Xbox.

Previews

Deeper looks at Xbox games of the future

Organic-looking environments match the very organic nature of the game perfectly. It's all about growth, physical and spiritual. Whoa... that's heavy.

Project Id

What would *Project Ego* be like if it were developed by the shooter kings at Id Software? Well, here's our feature list, as imagined by us – your kings.

- **Game has to be updated to latest beta release every third time you play it.**
- **Character behaves explosively, as limbs fly off to signify aging process.**
- **"Ever-changing-world" is knee-deep in blood by the time your character is 20.**
- **Characters say things like, "Eat my fifth-level magic, orc-breath."**
- **Entire plot revolves around the skill of "wand-jumping," where you shoot magic at the ground to jump higher.**
- **John Romero starts work on rival game called *Project Superego*, starring Sly Boots III.**

No ground-breaking game would be complete without ground-breaking lens flare. This time, it's using the awesome horsepower of GeForce graphics.

Project Ego

There's nothing more absorbing than being self-absorbed…

When this game shows up, sometime in the fall of 2002 (cross fingers, pray), it might well redefine the difference between a console and a PC game. Its developer, Big Blue Box, is headed by Peter Molyneux, a man who has often expressed his frustration at the PC's ever-changing development base. The Xbox, more than any other console in history, addresses and fixes those concerns – with bells on. Xbox, by all accounts, is Molyneux's dream machine.

In a very broad, simplistic sense, this game is an RPG. It even looks a little like a somewhat idealized Japanese RPG. Characters wear big floppy boots and smile with oversized anime eyes. Even the protagonist is a prototypically Japanese RPG kind of hero: a 15-year-old male or female complete with the issues associated with troubled teenagers (except acne – come on, how about some realism!). But from that point on, *Project Ego* takes a dramatically different path.

For one thing, this might be the first mainstream game featuring a character that actually ages as the game progresses – and it's not the simple switch between childhood and adulthood seen in *Zelda*, but rather a constant maturation process that's shaped by your actions throughout the game. And the process is frighteningly organic – by the time your character grows to adulthood, their appearance will be defined by how much exercise they've had, or how much exposure to sunlight. If you want to be buff and tan by the time you're 30 years old (and who doesn't), you'll have to make choices to achieve that. Like a classic RPG, those who choose a life of magic use will tend to the gray and infirm spectrum, while warriors



Our hero wanders in a town that will eventually be populated with living, breathing characters.

There are enough subtle factors to ensure that identical characters will be a pretty rare coincidence.

TRACK RECORD

DEVELOPER: **Big Blue Box** | PUBLISHER: **Microsoft** | RELEASE DATE: **Fall 2002**

WHO ARE THEY?: Big Blue Box is a brand-new company, and its first project is, in fact, *Project Ego*. But Big Blue Box is not without some heritage, having been founded by industry legend Peter Molyneux – the West's answer to Shigeru Miyamoto. But like any company, it's got other people in it, many of whom seem to be playing either *Final Fantasy VII*, *FFVIII*, or *Vagrant Story*, at least according to the bios on their website – which is very interesting, given the graphic design of *Project Ego*, which does sit somewhere squarely between Japanese and Western design sensibilities. We even see shades of Japanese RPG character in the choice of brash young protagonists.



Only on Xbox

This is currently an Xbox exclusive, and has all the hallmarks so far of a must-have, in the *Metal Gear/Zelda* mold. The fact that it relies heavily on graphic features and the hard-drive found on Xbox means that it's unlikely to appear on other, less fully-featured systems anytime soon. It might, however, make it to PC.

EGO-MANIAC: Although the word *ego* is associated with self-importance (and Madonna), its Indo-European root in the word *eg* simply means *I*.

OOPS: Last issue, we falsely reported that Xbox would support progressive scan on DVD playback. They changed it because of some licensing issues. There are still 69 reasons to buy an Xbox.



■ Take the path of light and become a goody two-shoes. Do good, be good.

■ You have a life to live, so build a house, or even a castle.



■ Behind closed doors, you'll be able to sire children and ensure your line.

■ Or you can run around murdering 'til your heart's black as coal...

If the Xbox ever needed a reason to have a hard-drive, then *Project Ego* might be it.

end up looking more like barbarians – in that sense, the game feeds on itself and the history of the genre. It's difficult to describe character classes, since they are shaped by player actions, not simply assembled from a shortlist of features. It is very likely that every character created in *Project Ego* will be unique – sure, there'll be similarities in appearance and ability, but there are enough subtle factors to ensure that identical characters will be a pretty rare coincidence.

Appearance is one thing, but the game's primary function is to define character in its truer sense, that of good and evil and the various shades in between. Rob and kill, and of course you'll become evil, but it's also possible (and presumably more difficult) to lead a just and noble existence, perhaps becoming a knight or king.

And if the Xbox ever needed a reason to have a hard-drive, then *Project Ego* might be it. The world you explore and in which you live your life is constantly evolving, and that's only practical with a dense storage medium like the 10-gig Xbox hard-drive. And this is an ambitious world. Trees actually grow, seasons pass, and people's reactions to your behavior and appearance will change over time. Molyneux promises that you will even be able to have children in the game. At that point we recommend choosing a male character, since nine months of cramps and morning sickness does not sound like fun or very useful for storming castles and whatnot.

What's not clear at this point is the minutiae of the gameplay. Is this a *Zelda*-style adventure with linear paths? Is it a *Final Fantasy*-style stat builder? Is it wholly new and original? The 3D graphic engine has great possibilities for all of those options, and its use of light, shadow, and rich environment is pretty peerless.

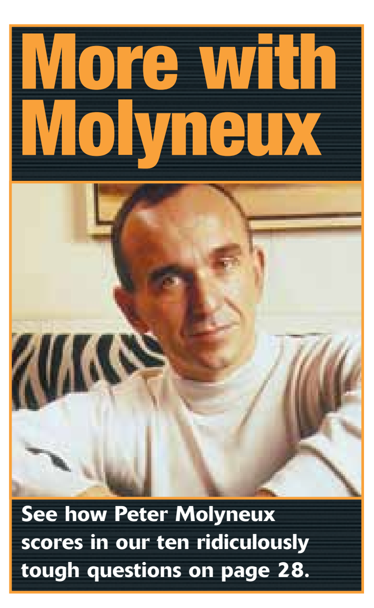
Black and White, Molyneux's previous project at Lionhead Studios, was an almost absurdly ambitious game that really worked, on every level. It was even polished and pretty when it shipped. If *Project Ego* fulfills even half of its promise, then it's likely to be a gaming benchmark, like *Mario 64* or even *Populous*.

— Frank O'Connor

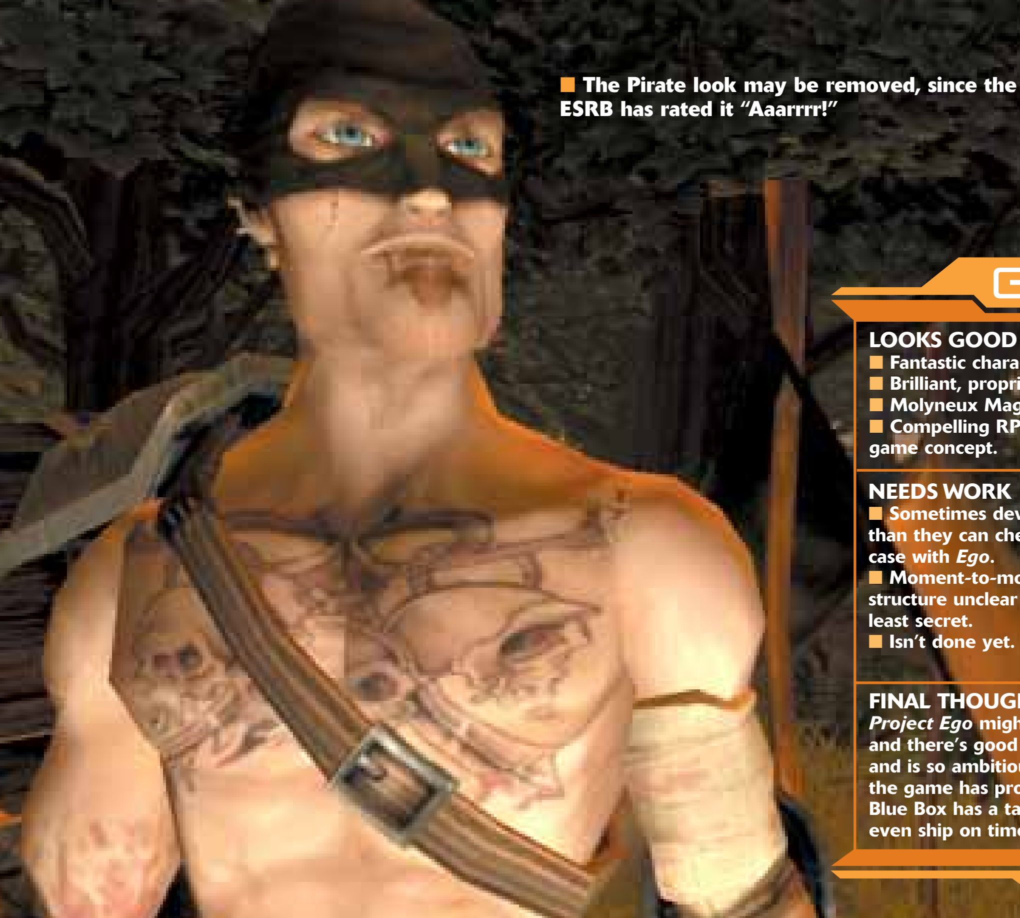
WIRED

Honestly, www.bigbluebox.com is a remarkably entertaining website. So go read it. Right now.

More with Molyneux



See how Peter Molyneux scores in our ten ridiculously tough questions on page 28.



■ The Pirate look may be removed, since the ESRB has rated it "Aaarrrr!"

GAME POTENTIAL

LOOKS GOOD
- Fantastic character design.
- Brilliant, proprietary graphics engine.
- Molyneux Magic™.
- Compelling RPG/Godgame/Adventure game concept.

ODDS ARE...
This will expand the boundaries of gameplay in roughly the same way as *Black and White* and *Populous* did before it. Only with better graphics.

NEEDS WORK
- Sometimes developers bite off more than they can chew – that could be the case with *Ego*.
- Moment-to-moment gameplay structure unclear at this point, or at least secret.
- Isn't done yet. Hurry up, already.

HYPE
Nothing creates its own drama like a new Molyneux game. He's the closest thing we've got to Spielberg. One slight hindrance – *Project Ego* isn't the game's final name, so they'd better rename it quick before people get used to this moniker.

FINAL THOUGHTS
Project Ego might be to the Xbox what *Metal Gear Solid 2* is to the PS2 – and there's good and bad in that equation. *MGS2* is still nowhere in sight and is so ambitious in scope that delays are probably unavoidable. That said, the game has progressed remarkably in its short development cycle, and Big Blue Box has a talented bunch under its eaves, so who knows? This might even ship on time.

Freeze-frame >>>>>

TRULY ORGANIC WORLD
WHAT IS IT?: The world of *Ego* evolves with you – seasons change, trees grow.

The combination of massive graphics horsepower and a hard-drive makes miracles happen on Xbox.



1 Something as simple as a choice of weapon will have a cascading effect on how *Ego* evolves.

2 It wouldn't be an Xbox game without self-shadowing musculature, and if being buff and ripped isn't enough, you can get tattoos, or even pile on some pounds. Like Subway's Jared, in reverse.

3 Volumetric grass may be old hat, but volumetric wheat? Infinitely more fiber and actually pretty complex. Sure makes the world look real, though.

■ **SUPEREGO:** The game *Project Ego* was originally known as *Heroes*, and then *Fable*. Kind of fitting, since most real heroes are generally just fables anyway.

■ **BIZARRO JARED:** Maybe we're just weird, but we are so waiting for Jack In The Box to debut a Bizarro Jared who gains 250 pounds eating Ultimate Cheeseburgers and curly fries.



Buffy the Vampire Slayer

Stakes: Never been higher...

For those that follow *Buffy*, it's not so much a TV show as a religion. Seldom has the sci-fi fantasy genre been so generously and consistently well presented on TV. In place of the drab and repetitious plots of, say, *Star Trek Voyager*, viewers are given a constantly expanding, ever-surprising series of shows, with the wit and sophistication of *The Sopranos*, and the compelling nature of that age-old story: good versus evil. Frankly, good never looked so good. It's about time Sarah Michelle Gellar's indisputable charms made it to a videogame near us.

In spite of the fact that the movie that this show (and ostensibly this game) is based on came out around ten years ago, Buffy is still 17 years old and still battling the forces of evil. What has changed very dramatically, though, is her persona. She used to be a somewhat addled teenager and was actually pretty dense and naïve. Now she's a supernatural badass known as The Chosen One.

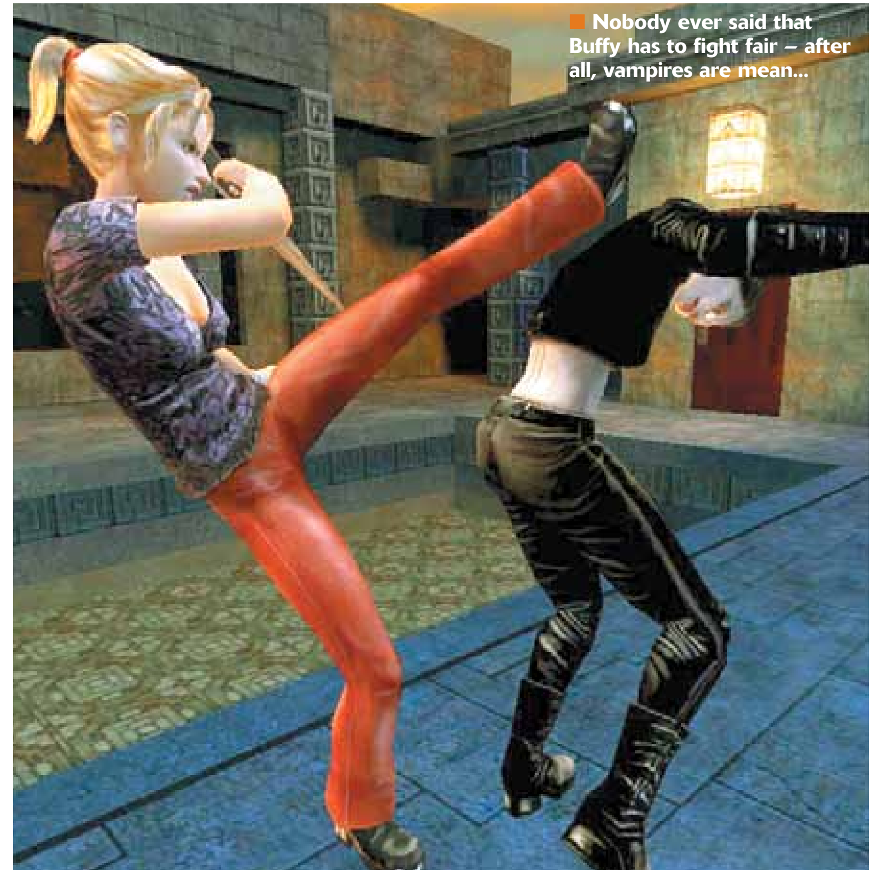
This Chosen status translates nicely into videogame status, thank you very much, and the resulting third-person action/adventure is shaping up as a clear lesson to the tired and soupy *Tomb Raider* franchise – faster, more action-packed, and infinitely more controllable. The emphasis here, though, is on combat – not on puzzle solving.

The game consists of lots of familiar areas from the TV show, including the Bronze nightclub, the high school, and the unfortunately placed library, which sits upon



Only on Xbox

Expect intensive use of the Xbox's pixel-shaders to make magic effects, fog, and explosions look almost desperately colorful and scary. We're also hoping to see fully bump-mapped textures in here, although it's very likely that the game will ship without any useful Internet features.



■ Nobody ever said that Buffy has to fight fair – after all, vampires are mean...

TRACK RECORD

DEVELOPER: **The Collective** PUBLISHER: **EA/ Fox Interactive** RELEASE DATE: **Q1 2002**

WHO ARE THEY?: Although this game is being distributed, packaged, and effectively published by Electronic Arts, the game was originally to be published by Fox Interactive, a company that wisely got out of the expensive business of moving boxes of games around in favor of the glamour and swank of simply utilizing its not-inconsiderable quiver of TV and movie licenses. The developer, The Collective, has collected prior experience on some shoddy PC games – hopefully, this will change.

GAME:	SYSTEM:	SCORE:
Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: The Fallen	**PC**	7/10
Men in Black	**PC**	3/10
AVERAGE:		5/10

■ **NOSFERATU:** The expression *Nosferatu* comes from ancient Transylvanian legend. It means, literally, "not-dead" – which is appropriate, since Buffy isn't dead, after all.

Combat is deep, intense, and possessed of some of the most detailed graphics you've ever seen.

WIRED

Two choices. We could direct you to www.foxinteractive.com so you could learn about games they haven't published in three years, *or* tell you to go to www.buffyguide.com and study every script ever written.

Combatants learn from their mistakes and get smarter.

the entrance to hell. Good luck turning that place into some live/work lofts. The graphics, as you can see from the screenshots, are extraordinarily detailed, and have improved tremendously since this first appeared on the radar as a PC title. Each location is brilliantly rendered and very convincing. Light and shadow cast their gloomy and atmospheric pall on the proceedings, but it's the character builds that really show off the game.

The Buffy model is lithe, animated, and extremely true to its real-life counterpart. Finally – Sarah Michelle Gellar is under your complete control, just as you've always dreamed. Sadly for you and luckily for her, all you can do with her is run, jump, climb, and thoroughly kick butt. The game's combat system is pretty ambitious, with a huge arsenal of standard and special "Slayer" moves, as well as combatants who learn from their mistakes and get smarter as the game progresses.

To keep you occupied throughout, there are dozens of demons and zombies wandering around, just waiting to get beaten up, but more challenging foes in the shape of Spike, The Master, and Drusilla will also be making an appearance. As the plot progresses, you're joined by the clean-cut ever-so shiny and wholesome voices of Xander, Angel, Willow, Cordelia, and Giles, and there are lots more in there, too. We can't tell you too much about the plot, because that would spoil it – but we can say that the game, like the show, is full of surprises.

– Frank O'Connor

Vampire – or goth girl with bad teeth?

Everything I know about vampires, I learned from Count Chocula

Vampire Fact 1: Although Vlad the Impaler was brutal and all about impaling folks, history notes that he was otherwise a fair and fiscally prudent leader.

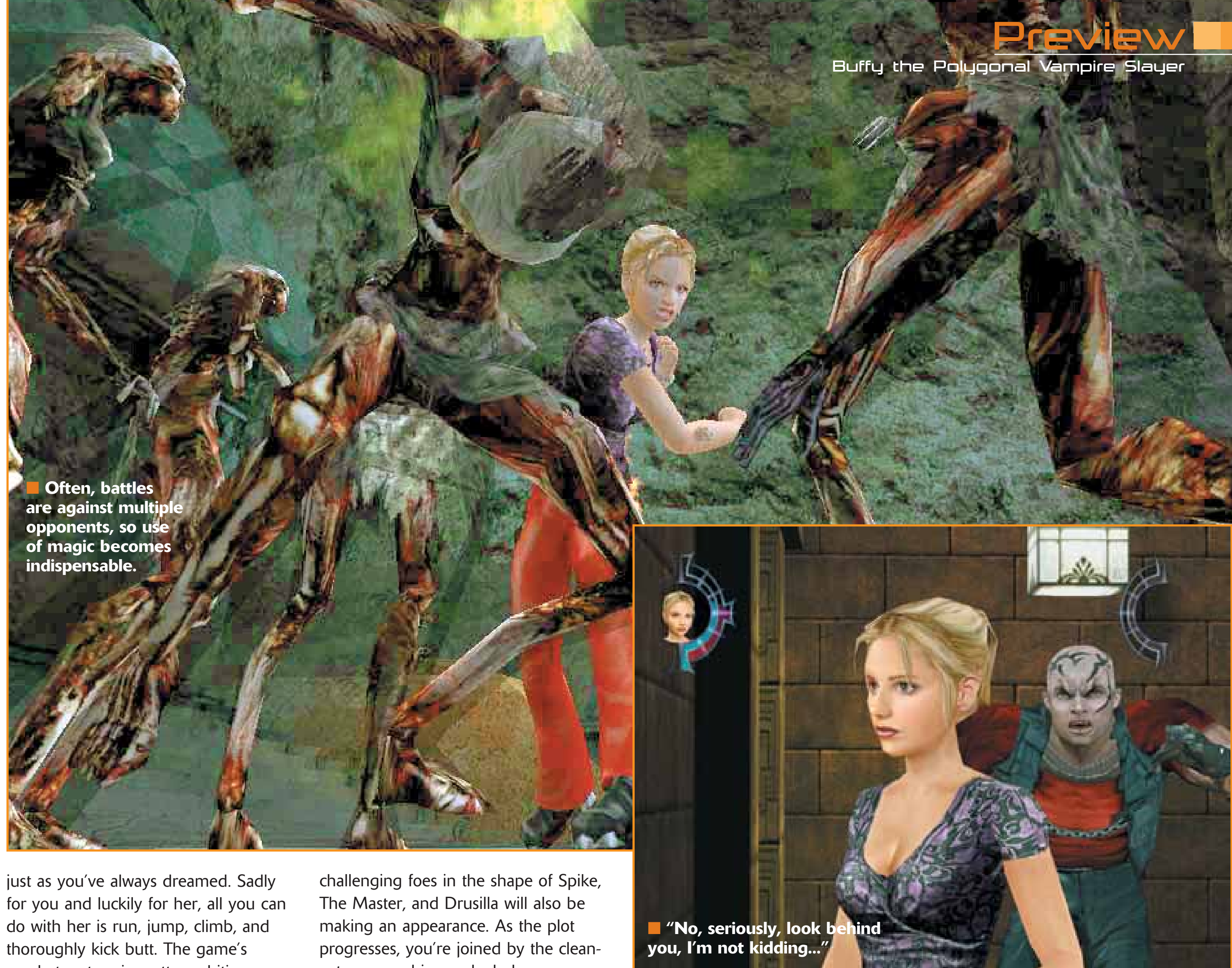
Vampire Fact 2: Vampire bats will, in fact, bite humans, although they prefer cattle. The biggest risk is from rabies or other infection. Not from the cattle, though, from the bats.

Vampire Fact 3: The distinctive color of poo is caused by bilirubin, a by-product of red blood cells. Vampires, however, don't like poo.

Vampire Fact 4: A vampire could easily beat a werewolf in a fight, since it could shoot silver bullets just as well as some dude. Plus they can fly and stuff.

Vampire Fact 5: A vampire can only enter your house if invited. Or if you failed to select the Vampire-opt-out check box at the bottom of a web page.

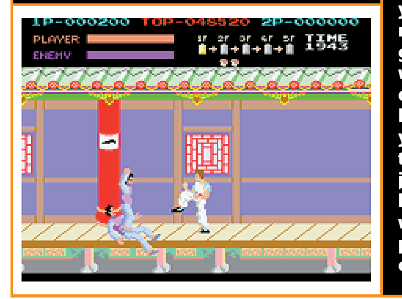
Vampire Fact 6: There are only five known facts about vampires. See above.



Often, battles are against multiple opponents, so use of magic becomes indispensable.

"No, seriously, look behind you, I'm not kidding..."

Old-school



Frankly, this *Buffy* game looks like an absurdly ambitious version of Capcom's *Final Fight*. And if you think you're old-school for remembering Hagar, Guy, and the guys, then you're SOL. Old-school would be remembering how to defeat the guy with the bombs from Irem's *Kung Fu Master*. We'd give you that, but if you remembered off the top of your head what the joystick combo for a roundhouse kick in Data East's *Karate Champ* was, we'd have to give you mad props. And don't even get us started on Konami's *Yie Ar Kung Fu*...

GAME POTENTIAL

LOOKS GOOD

- **Staggeringly realistic character models – almost worthy of Namco or Tecmo.**
- **Beautifully fashioned and lit environments.**
- **Everyone from the TV show (except Buffy) lent their voices.**

NEEDS WORK

- **What? No Sarah Michelle voiceover?**
- **These games have a tendency toward the repetitious...**
- **Her outfit is far too wholesome.**

THE HYPE

By the time this game appears, the *Buffy* TV show will have eased out of the dubba-dubba-dubba-dubba WB and into its new home at "Oopin'" UPN. This should keep geeks happy, at least until the new *Star Trek* show (which was a bit better than we expected) gets its legs; it might also help create a little more buzz for this videogame incarnation of the show. Other than that, we can't see how hard it will be to sell Sarah Michelle to the gaming public.

THE HOPE

If the gameplay can live up the standards already set by the graphics, then we might be in for a treat. However, as Square's *The Bouncer* (another third-person old-school combat game) ably demonstrated, it *is* possible to polish a turd. This will have to feature slick, intuitive combat, lots of varying challenges, and possibly even some multiplayer action to keep us interested by the time it rolls around. That or a nude code, anyway.

BEST VAMPIRE MOVIE EVER: *Near Dark* is up there, but possibly the best vampire movie ever made is the little-known *Love at First Bite*, starring George Hamilton as the tannest Dracula ever.

HATE AT FIRST BITE: There've been good (*Castlevania*) and bad (*Vampire Hunter D*) vampire games, but Psygnosis Sega CD atrocity *Bram Stoker's Dracula* was so dreadfully rotten that it nearly ruined the genre.

SSX Tricky

Mmm, deliciously fresh virgin powder. An unspoiled canvas for us to paint our wrath on.

SSX Tricky is arriving on some crowded slopes. When the game shows up, hopefully this year, it'll be on a system already inhabited by THQ's *Dark Summit* and Microsoft's own *Amped*. To be fair, this has more in common with *Dark Summit* than *Amped*, and if you're not at least vaguely familiar with the original *SSX* concept, then let us enlighten you. It's snowboarding, with the emphasis on fun, rather than simulation.

The game comes from EA's "Big" sports label – where words like "extreme" and "radical" are thrown around with irresponsible abandon. *SSX* took the gaming world (and apparently EA) by surprise when it eclipsed almost every other PS2 title – both in gameplay and graphical achievement. *SSX Tricky* is described as an update rather than a true sequel – but that's a very modest claim.

For one thing, all the levels on *SSX Tricky* are brand new – that is to say, radically redesigned with different routes, even if they're located on roughly the same mountains (EA describes the courses as about 50% different, but that, of course, means 100% different in terms of overall experience). There are also two completely new hills to conquer: Garibaldi, which is in beautiful (and appropriately cold) British Columbia, and the simply titled Alaska. You can probably guess where that is. Both new mountains offer new challenges – Garibaldi focuses on big air, while Alaska gives you the kind of extreme verts that make those extreme snowboarding movies so watchable.

The "Tricky" part of the title has a two-fold meaning – one is that the game's emphasis has in fact shifted even more toward tricks and (we're sick of saying this) seems a little more like *Tony Hawk* than before. Grinding, for one thing, seems noticeably easier in this new incarnation of the game, and certainly a lot more frequent. Riders have a set of basic skills, but each character also has access to his or her specific set of moves. The other part of the "Tricky" nomenclature? There's an early rumor that British pop star Tricky will be on the soundtrack. We *do* know that the Beastie Boys will be making an appearance.

Character development, which was fine in the first game, has taken on a more serious (and expensive) note in this sequel. Although Japanese and German legends Hiro and Jurgen won't be making it this time around, the original other six are there, but will be joined by six new characters, voiced by some big-name talent, including Lucy Liu, Billy Zane, and Macy Gray (although it seems like these might be subject to change).

There is one downside to the Xbox iteration of the game (also suffered on the GameCube version), which is the fact that the control scheme has been "shrunk" to accommodate the two shoulder buttons on the controller, as opposed to the PS2's four. Which sucks, but the developers promise the Xbox control scheme will be a delight, and based on our early tests, we're inclined to agree.

– Frank O'Connor

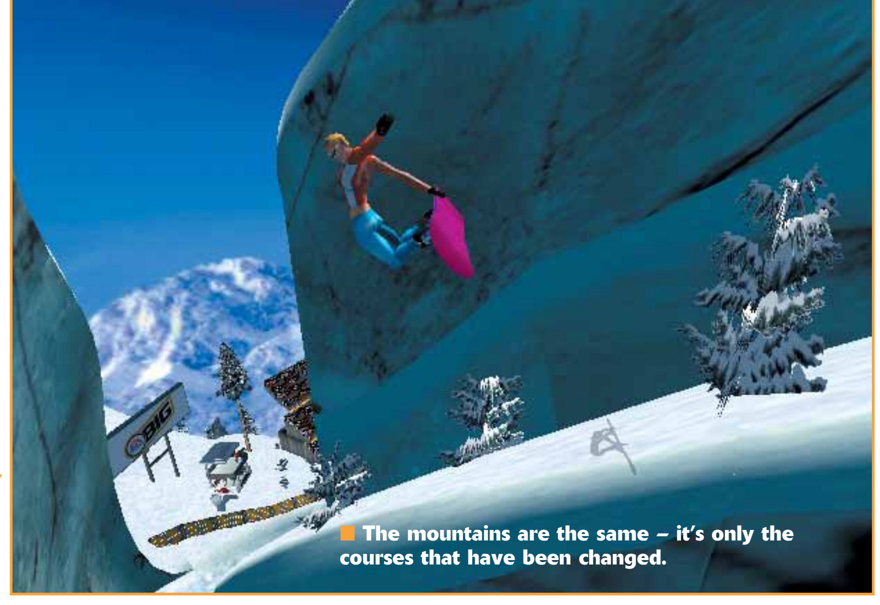
"Extreme" and "radical" are thrown around with irresponsible abandon.

TRACK RECORD

DEVELOPER: **EA Sports Big** PUBLISHER: **EA Sports** RELEASE DATE: **Nov./Dec. 2001**

WHO ARE THEY?: EA is a freakishly large corporate behemoth, as cold and unforgiving as the ice in *SSX*. EA Sports Big is what they call an "imprint," which is a way to explain why some of the sports are "wacky" like *SSX* and *NBA Streets*, while others are "serious" like *Madden* and *NHL*. Frankly, nobody cares about the imprints except the marketing people at EA who have to keep themselves busy, but it is a good way to spend millions of dollars of a marketing budget for no good reason.

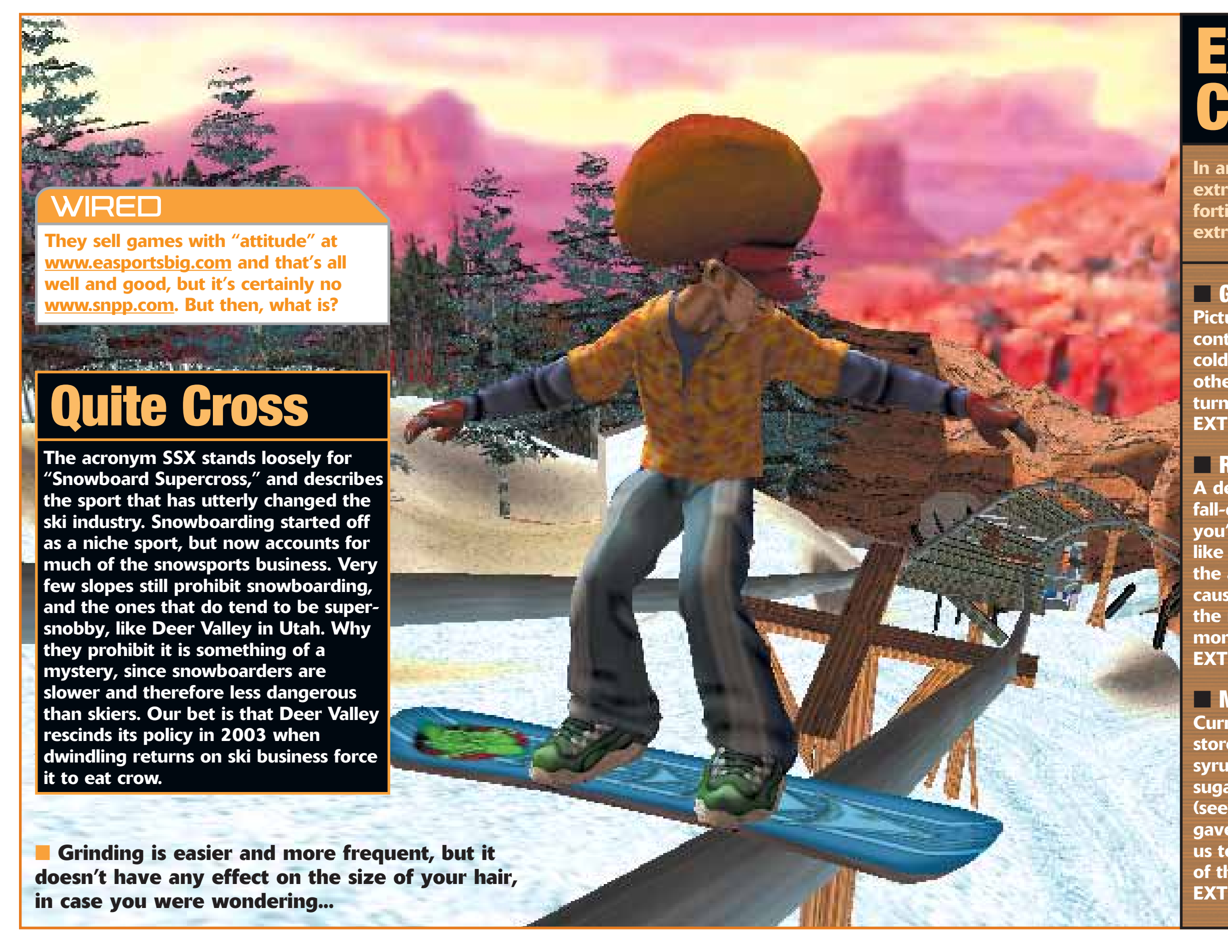
GAME:	SYSTEM:	SCORE:
NBA Streets	**PS2**	5/10
SSX	**PS2**	7/10
AVERAGE:		6/10



The mountains are the same – it's only the courses that have been changed.



There is a bigger arsenal of tricks to choose from this time.



WIRED

They sell games with "attitude" at www.easportsbig.com and that's all well and good, but it's certainly no www.snpp.com. But then, what is?

Quite Cross

The acronym SSX stands loosely for "Snowboard Supercross," and describes the sport that has utterly changed the ski industry. Snowboarding started off as a niche sport, but now accounts for much of the snowsports business. Very few slopes still prohibit snowboarding, and the ones that do tend to be super-snobby, like Deer Valley in Utah. Why they prohibit it is something of a mystery, since snowboarders are slower and therefore less dangerous than skiers. Our bet is that Deer Valley rescinds its policy in 2003 when dwindling returns on ski business force it to eat crow.

Grinding is easier and more frequent, but it doesn't have any effect on the size of your hair, in case you were wondering...

Extreme Cold

In an attempt to prepare for the most extreme of sports, we decided to fortify ourselves with the most extreme drink we could find.

Gatorade Ice
Pictures of frozen mountains on container gave the illusion of extreme cold, but alas, it just tasted like every other flavor of Gatorade – which in turn tastes just like Capri Sun.
EXTREME FACTOR: 5 (of 10)

Red Bull & vodka
A deadly combination that'll get you fall-down drunk and so wired that'll you'll get back up and stumble around like a flea on crack until eventually the acidic nature of the beverage will cause a permanent ulcer and make the rest of your miserable life even more miserable.
EXTREME FACTOR: 9 (of 10)

Mountain Dew Slurpee
Currently available exclusively at 7-11 stores nationwide. Not only did this syrupy viscous nightmare cause a sugar rush of Screech-like proportions (see *Saved by the Bell*, 1993), it also gave us a brain freeze that required us to be hurtled into the burning core of the sun for relief.
EXTREME FACTOR: 10 (of 10)

GAME POTENTIAL

LOOKS GOOD
- Amazing new levels.
- Cool new characters.
- Bump-mapping and self-shadowing.
- Tons of play modes and two-player options.

ODDS ARE...
This will happily take over as the number-one snowboarding experience on the Xbox, unless *Amped* or *Dark Summit* can really pull some surprises out of the bag. It also sets up the Xbox for a nice run of *SSX* sequels and probably conversions of other EA Sports Big titles.

NEEDS WORK
- No worthwhile hard-drive interaction.
- Framerates and camera unfinished when we saw it.
- "Shrinking" the controls is absolutely unnecessary.

HYPE:
EA may not know how to be warm and fuzzy, but it could sell pineapple to Hawaiians and tips on etiquette to the Japanese. Expect a massive marketing blitz with TV ads, posters, magazine spreads, and possibly sky-writers over the White House. The momentum and fanbase *SSX* already has probably won't hurt one little bit either.

FINAL THOUGHTS
Although the version we played was some way from completion, it was already apparent that barring some unseen disaster, or an unlikely pack of lies from EA, this is going to be a stunning game – possibly the best version on any console. Self shadowing, bump-mapping – these are terms we like to hear. In fact, these are terms we should demand from now on. The tune selection from top artistes just makes us like it more.



Go from a grab trick to rail to multiply your points. If it sounds like *Tony Hawk*, it's because it is.

ABSOLUTE ZERO: In all materials, a point is eventually reached at which all oscillations are the slowest they can possibly be. The temperature which corresponds to this point is called absolute zero.

COLDER THAN A WITCH'S TEAT: This is a misleading expression, since witch's teats are technically no colder than, say, a cow's. Which are warm. And don't even start on the Wiccans...



■ "All I wanted to do was take your temperature! Please don't… turn away… [*sob*]

Silent Hill 2: Restless Dreams

Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets…

Silent Hill. A small town nestled on the shores of a large lake, bustling with tourists and quiet cafés. *Silent Hill 2: Restless Dreams*, on the other hand, is a darkly disturbing game, filled with grotesque imagery and a wicked storyline. What the game does with this sleepy, small town is methodically transforms what could be Anytown, USA, into a breeding ground for all the things that lurk within the shadowy corners of our darkest fears and imagination.

And the result is even more terrifying than the original, with a heavy emphasis on story and sound. Players assume the role of James Sunderland, an ordinary man who is haunted by the death of his wife, Mary, three years prior. But his mourning is interrupted by the arrival of a letter from his deceased wife, recently postmarked, asking him to meet her in their "special place" in Silent Hill. Could she still be alive?

As with almost everything in *Silent Hill 2*, nothing can be easily classified as being real or unreal. As the game begins and the opening movie fades, we find James already on the outskirts of the town, ready to track down Mary and resume what was once a very happy life. But nothing is as it seems. The town is blocked off and the only way to reach Silent Hill is on foot, through a dense shroud of eerie fog. Is this a dream?

TRACK RECORD

DEVELOPER: **Konami** | PUBLISHER: **Konami Computer Entertainment Tokyo**

RELEASE DATE: **Dec. 2001**

WHO ARE THEY?: The actual core team responsible for the *Silent Hill* series is only a small part of Konami's immense network of developers located in Japan. The Tokyo office has produced such wonders as the *Suikoden* series, as well as the *Beatmania* ("bemani") series. So, how did a group of developers surrounded by people creating music games and RPGs come up with something as twisted and dark as the original *Silent Hill*? We're not sure, either, but a huge load of the credit goes to the series' CG and character designer Takayoshi Sato, sound genius Akira Yamoka, and producer Akihiro Imamuro. Collectively, the three have worked on only a handful of other Konami games in the past, including *International Track 'n' Field* (PSOne).



■ While there are fewer monster models in *SH2* than in the original, they're no less creepy or deadly.

Unlike its distant survival-horror cousin, Capcom's *Resident Evil*, the *Silent Hill* series aims for a much more cerebral sense of terror. Instead of merely opting to shock gamers with B-movie thrills, *Silent Hill* constructs its trademark brand of dread and fear through suspense and an uncanny ability to press all the right buttons.

And while this isn't a brand-new episode in the series, Konami has made sure that the Xbox version has enough new features and story elements to warrant that this is more than a mere PS2 redux. In fact, with the additions Konami has planned, *SH2: RD* will be a significantly longer and more fully fleshed-out adventure. While the development team has made the necessary cosmetic changes needed for the transition from PS2 to Xbox, they've also seen fit to create whole new areas to explore and an entirely new "chapter" to the game. And not only is there a new character to play as in the game, there are also new characters to interact with on your journey. In essence, *SH2: RD* doesn't merely revisit the PS2 version, it literally reworks the game into a brand-new experience.

As big fans of the original and the PS2 sequel, we simply cannot wait to get our hands on *Silent Hill 2: Restless Dreams*. Scary, dark, and deep, it will give Xbox owners plenty of hours of gameplay to keep them from restful sleep.

– *Francesca Reyes*

■ Expect to fondle corpses for keys and search garbage chutes for clues. All in a day's work…

Strangers in the night

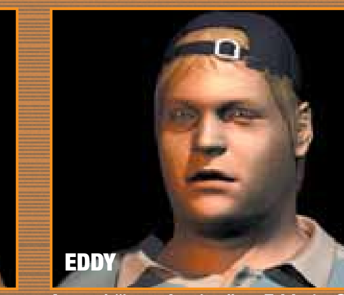
The PS2 version had only five different characters to interact with. The upcoming Xbox revision will have more. Life is sweet, indeed.



MARIA
She's the spitting image of James' dead wife, but her extroverted tendencies and fashion sense clearly differentiate her from Mary. So, who is she? And what is she doing in Silent Hill?



ANGELA
A strange and brooding girl with a past as mysterious as Silent Hill's, James will cross paths with Angela on many occasions, but who is she really looking for in the town?



EDDY
James' "introduction" to Eddy in *Silent Hill 2* is definitely one of the most memorable, for the mere sound effects alone. We won't ruin it for you, but be sure to keep a bucket handy.



LAURA
A bratty little girl who seems to know all the twists and turns of Silent Hill. Though she's alone, she doesn't seem to pay much attention to the hordes of monsters that inhabit the town.



MARY
Stricken with an unnamed, but terminal, disease, Mary was a kind, loving wife to James before she passed away three years ago. But could she be alive and somewhere in Silent Hill?



JAMES
Our main guy and the initially playable character. He's been through a lot lately, so can you trust his judgment to see you through and to ultimately solve the mysteries of Silent Hill?

WIRED

While there's not much in the way of *Silent Hill 2: RD* Xbox-specific goodies at www.konami.com/silenthill2, check it out anyway for a cool treat.

GAME POTENTIAL

LOOKS GOOD
- The oft-hyped CG cinemas are simply butter… smooth, silky, melting in your mouth.
- If the first game scared you silly, prepare for a mega-dose of the creeps.
- Additional features for the Xbox-only version certainly merit a playthrough from fans.

ODDS ARE…
This is one game that is unparalleled in survival horror for its uniquely disturbing imagery and strange storyline. While it may, for the most part, be a rehash of what has come before on PS2, it's superb for delivering the message that Xbox ain't just for kiddies.

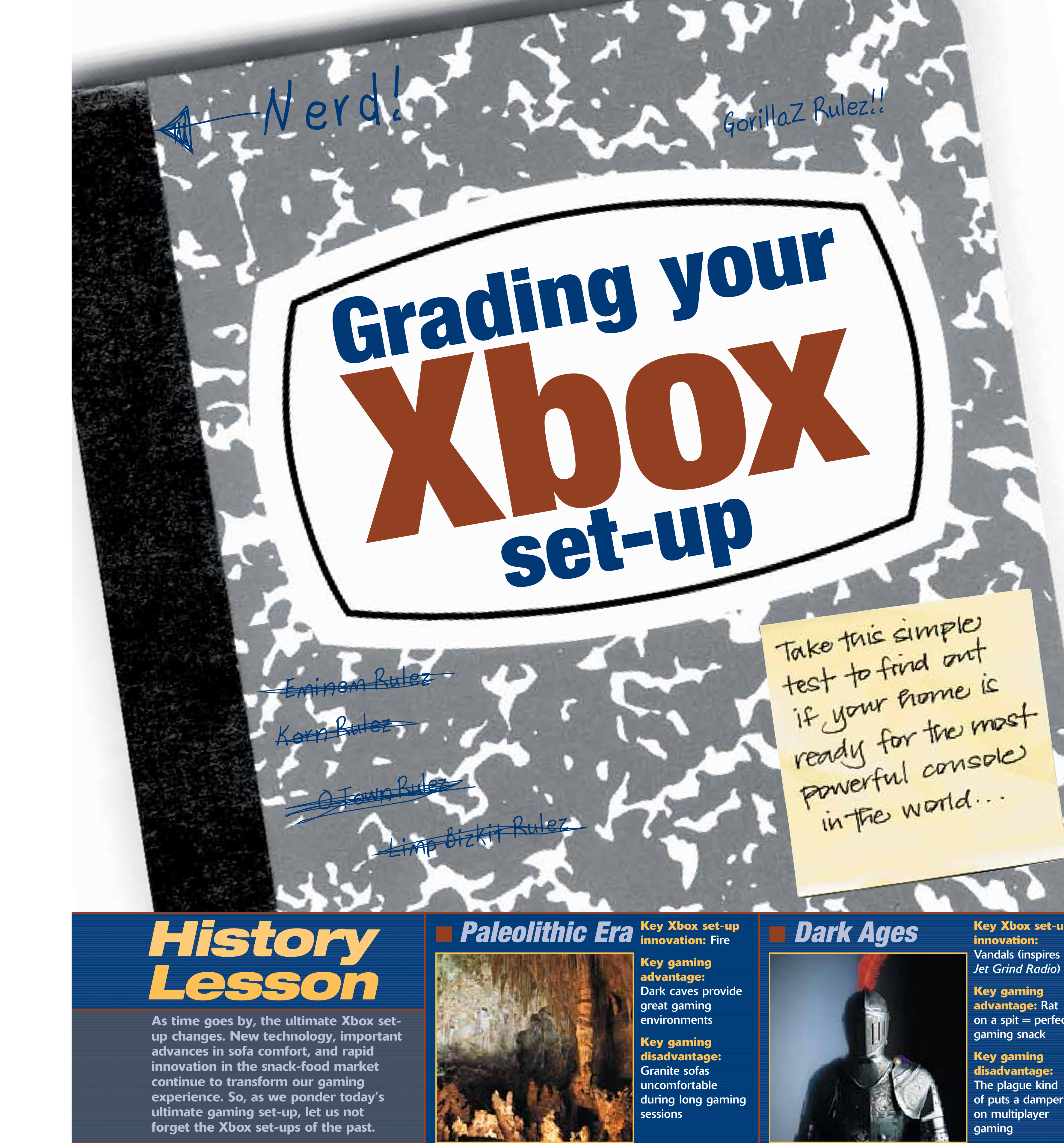
NEEDS WORK
- Will there be more replay value, besides different endings, for Xbox owners?
- Stretches of gameplay seem a bit aimless and slow down the pace.

HYPE:
Though touted by some as violent and gory, anyone in the know realizes that this is only partially the case when it comes to *Silent Hill 2*. There's much more to the game than its M Rating hype; it harbors some of the best-looking cinematics around, along with a well-fleshed-out storyline and creepy gameplay to boot.

FINAL THOUGHTS
From what we've seen of the game, thus far, this is definitely THE premier survival horror adventure to keep Xbox owners up at night. Next issue, expect a full review of *Silent Hill 2* where we give you the lowdown on the full experience.

■ **LAKE CREEPY:** There is a real-life Toluca Lake (also found in the game) located just south of Modesto, CA. Just ask Salmon, who survived the horror of working at a country radio station in Modesto for years.

■ **SOLO HILL:** Sato "Takayoshi" Sato, the CG artist and character designer for *SH2*, created and fine-tuned all the CG cinematics and character design for the PlayStation original by himself! He finally got a little help for the sequel.



History Lesson

As time goes by, the ultimate Xbox set-up changes. New technology, important advances in sofa comfort, and rapid innovation in the snack-food market continue to transform our gaming experience. So, as we ponder today's ultimate gaming set-up, let us not forget the Xbox set-ups of the past.

Paleolithic Era

Key Xbox set-up innovation: Fire

Key gaming advantage: Dark caves provide great gaming environments

Key gaming disadvantage: Granite sofas uncomfortable during long gaming sessions

Dark Ages

Key Xbox set-up innovation: Vandals (inspires *Jet Grind Radio*)

Key gaming advantage: Rat on a spit = perfect gaming snack

Key gaming disadvantage: The plague kind of puts a damper on multiplayer gaming

■ **OLYMPIAN CHEAT FEAT:** The first recorded cheat in the Olympics was Eupolus of Thessaly, who bribed three boxers to fake defeat in 388 B.C. However, nobody bit anyone's ear off.

Is your home ready for the most powerful console in the world?

Listen up, class, the Xbox is here. So let's hope you've been doing your homework, because this is where the rubber meets the road. After all, you can't just bring the Xbox home and hook it up in any old room. The Xbox demands a home set-up worthy of its might. Is your home ready?

This is a take-home exam, and you should fill out the attached form in the very room where you hope to put your new system. Answer every question honestly, because cheaters *will* be punished. (And they never prosper.)

Once you are finished with this test, go back over it and you'll find some easy ways to boost the grade for your Xbox gaming set-up. Now, pencils ready... let's go.

The Test:

IMPORTANT
• USE A #2 PENCIL
• MAKE DARK MARKS
• FILL CIRCLES IN COMPLETELY
• EXAMPLE ‹A› ‹B› ⬬ ‹D› ‹E›

NAME ____________________

DATE ____________________

Television screen size		
< 13"	‹A›	+1
19"	‹B›	+2
20"	‹C›	+3
25"	‹D›	+4
27"	‹E›	+5
29"	‹F›	+6
32"	‹G›	+7
36"	‹H›	+8
40" to 50"	‹I›	+9
> 50"	‹J›	+10
Subtotal points =		

Television type		
Portable	‹A›	+1
B/W	‹B›	+2
Anything with wood-grain finish	‹C›	+3
Rear projection	‹D›	+4
Color, > three years old	‹E›	+5
Color, < three years old	‹F›	+6
Flat-screen color	‹G›	+7
Plasma	‹H›	+8
HDTV	‹I›	+9
Flat-screen HDTV	‹J›	+10
Subtotal points =		

Sound		
Mono TV speaker	‹A›	+1
Stereo TV speakers	‹B›	+2
Headphones	‹C›	+3
Stereo speakers away from TV	‹D›	+4
Speakers through amplifier	‹E›	+5
AC3 surround system	‹F›	+6
Dolby DTS Surround System	‹G›	+8
Dolby 5.1 Surround System	‹H›	+10
Subtotal points =		

Seating within nine feet of television		
Dirt	‹A›	+1
Lawn chair	‹B›	+2
Folding chair	‹C›	+3
Rolling chair	‹D›	+4
Papasan	‹E›	+5
Beanbag	‹F›	+6
Futon	‹G›	+7
Sofa	‹H›	+8
Recliner, > five years old	‹I›	+9
Recliner, < five years old	‹J›	+10
Subtotal points =		

Lighting control		
Just bare windows	‹A›	+1
Windows with lacy, translucent curtains	‹B›	+2
Windows with miniblinds	‹C›	+4
Blanket or sheet duct-taped over window	‹D›	+5
Windows with dark curtains	‹E›	+6
Windows with dark curtains *and* blinds	‹F›	+8
No windows, light-colored walls	‹G›	+9
No windows, walls as black as night	‹H›	+10
Subtotal points =		

Television inputs supported		
No input	‹A›	+0
Rabbit ears	‹B›	+1
VHF screws	‹C›	+2
Coaxial cable	‹D›	+3
RCA jacks	‹E›	+5
S-video	‹F›	+8
Component	‹G›	+10
Subtotal points =		

Distractions *(Give yourself one point for **each** NO Answer)*		
Do you have brothers, sisters, or children in the house?	‹no›	+1
More than one?	‹no›	+1
Do you live with your parents?	‹no›	+1
Do you have a roommate?	‹no›	+1
Are you dating anyone?	‹no›	+1
Do you have a pet?	‹no›	+1
Do you own a PS2?	‹no›	+1
Is your phone ringer turned on?	‹no›	+1
Do you carry a cell phone or pager?	‹no›	+1
Is there a clock in your gaming room?	‹no›	+1
Subtotal points =		

Test continued on the following page:→

Remote control		
Nothing I own uses a remote	‹A›	+1
Hella remotes	‹B›	+2
Four remotes	‹C›	+3
Three remotes	‹D›	+4
One remote, but then again, I only have one remote-controlled device	‹E›	+5
Two remotes	‹G›	+6
One remote for my two remote-controlled devices	‹H›	+8
One remote for my three (or more!) remote-controlled devices	‹J›	+10
Subtotal points =		

Food proximity From my primary gaming position I am within an arm's reach of: *(Give yourself one point for **each** box checked)*		
Anything flat enough to set a can on	‹A›	+2
Cooler	‹B›	+2
Mini fridge	‹C›	+2
Phone (for pizza delivery)	‹D›	+2
Cash to pay delivery guy	‹E›	+2
Subtotal points =		

Nearby extras *(Give yourself one point for **each** box checked)*		
Heater/fan	‹A›	+1
Emergency generator	‹B›	+1
Broadband Internet connection	‹C›	+1
Digital TV recorder	‹D›	+1
A "blankie"	‹E›	+1
No-Doz (for all-night sessions)	‹F›	+1
Deodorant (ditto)	‹G›	+1
Magazine rack with Official Xbox Magazine	‹H›	+1
Eye drops	‹I›	+1
Bathroom within 15 feet	‹J›	+1
Subtotal points =		

Test Record *Ad up all your subtotals from the test to see how ready you are....*	
Part 1	Part 6
Part 2	Part 7
Part 3	Part 8
Part 4	Part 9
Part 5	Part 10
TOTAL points =	

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Cheat sheet

The seven best ways to improve the grade for your Xbox game room

1. Upgrade your television
Everything revolves around your TV. Think HDTV if at all possible.

2. Improve your sound system
A home-theater sound system is costly, but it will make your games a much grander experience.

3. Comfort first
Don't settle for whatever seating is closest to the TV. You'll be playing for hours, so find a comfortable seating arrangement before you even start.

4. Focus on lighting
Uncovered windows or skylights can cause glare and distraction. Blinds, curtains, or makeshift coverings will solve this problem.

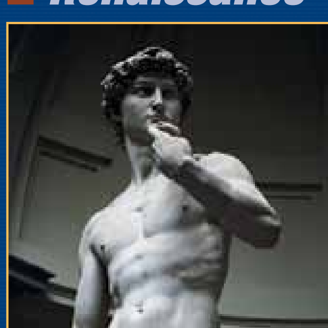
5. Study your peripherals
Sometimes peripherals can improve your gaming experience greatly. Try out the third-party controllers at a local game shop to see if they're right for you.

6. Stage a pre-emptive strike on distractions
Use your answering machine to screen calls, shut off your pager, toss the cell phone, lock the door, and tell your friends that you're off visiting your sick grandmother.

7. Snacks on hand
Don't wait until you're hungry to think about food. Grab snacks, drinks, and more solid foods before you even start, so you don't have to stop during a game.

FINAL SCORE	
90 -100	**Valedictorian** – Great score... maybe too great. This means you, cheaters
80 - 89	**Salutatorian** – You're the envy of your friends and lord of the boardz
70 - 79	**Summa Cum Laude** – Congratulations! You're in great shape for the Xbox launch
60 - 69	**Magna Cum Laude** – Pretty good, but you might want to do a *little* shopping, no offense
50 - 59	**Cum Laude** – You can enjoy your Xbox, but it's a limited, unfulfilling sort of enjoyment
40 - 49	**Graduate** – Well... you can at least invite people over without dying of shame
30 - 39	**Class Clown** – We feel the one thing you should be serious about is your Xbox set-up
20 - 29	**Dim Bulb** – But honey, we're just concerned that you're not living up to your *potential*
10 - 19	**Dropout** – The only explanation is that you *want* to fail
0 - 9	**Very Old, Very Young, or Very Dumb** – We figure you must be one of these things to score this low

Renaissance



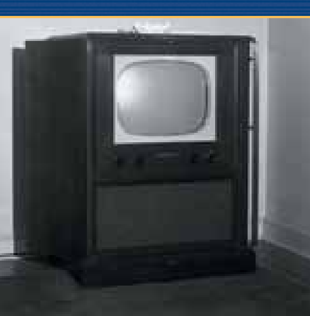
Key Xbox set-up innovation: Printing press (leads to **Official Xbox Magazine**)

Key gaming advantage: Sofas created for nude modeling also work well with games

Key gaming disadvantage: Lots of naked Italian men

1950s



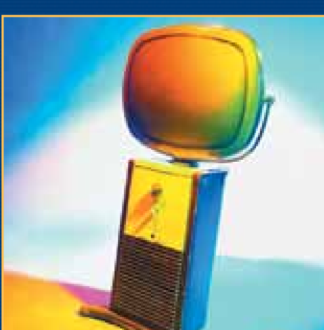


Key Xbox set-up innovation: the remote control, or "clicker." It really did click in those days, and quite loudly

Key gaming advantage: Huge TVs

Key gaming disadvantage: Tiny TV screens

1960s



Key Xbox set-up innovation: Color TV, at last

Key gaming advantage: Mind-altering drugs make game colors more vibrant

Key gaming disadvantage: Annoying flashbacks make videogames more frightening

1970s

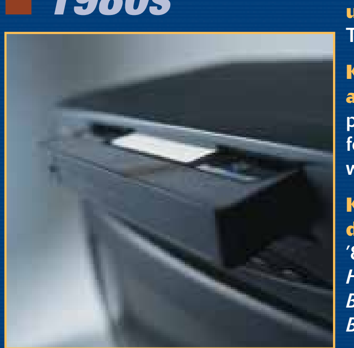


Key Xbox set-up innovation: Beanbags

Key gaming advantage: Hi-fi stereo sound for blasting soundtracks

Key gaming disadvantage: Realizing 52 games on Atari *Combat* actually meant 52 identical games

1980s

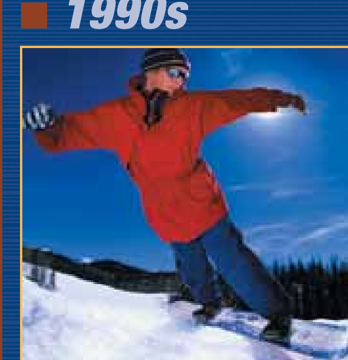


Key Xbox set-up innovation: The Internet

Key gaming advantage: The proliferation of VCRs for taping TV shows while gaming

Key gaming disadvantage: '80s TV (*Dukes of Hazzard, BJ and the Bear,* and *Bosom Buddies*)

1990s



Key Xbox set-up innovation: HDTV

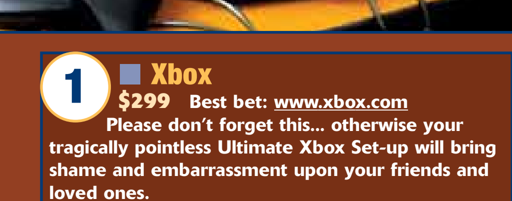
Key gaming advantage: The rise of "extreme" sports like skateboarding, snowboarding, etc.

Key gaming disadvantage: Vomit-inducing use of the word "extreme" by marketing execs

■ **THAT'S A MAN, BABY:** A famous Polish cheat, often thought erroneously to be an urban myth, was Stella Walsh, who was the first "woman" to break 11 seconds for the 100-yard run. "She" was in fact a fella, as a post-mortem exam revealed.

■ **VCR HISTORY:** JVC invented the VHS standard in 1978, battling against Sony's earlier Betamax and another system (with double-sided tapes) called Video 2000 from Philips.

Your pictorial guide to a perfect Xbox set-up...



1 ■ **Xbox**
$299 Best bet: www.xbox.com
Please don't forget this... otherwise your tragically pointless Ultimate Xbox Set-up will bring shame and embarrassment upon your friends and loved ones.

2 ■ **Ultimate TV**
$299 www.ultimatetv.com
Don't ever put off an Xbox game for a TV show... just digitally record it and watch it later.

3 ■ **Yamaha RP-U200**
$499 See page 80 for more details. (And put your ears real close to the magazine to hear how good this thing sounds while on mute.)

4 ■ **Yamaha RAV-2000 Intelligent Remote Control**
$499 See page 80 for more details on the remote control advanced enough to bring your father to tears.

5 ■ **R.O.B. (Robotic Operating Buddy)** $10.00 www.ebay.com
We love R.O.B. We're holding out hope that at least one Xbox game will support it.

6 ■ **RCA 36-Inch Digital High Resolution TV** $1699 See page 80 for more details. (And please note that we would have used a larger TV for the ultimate Xbox game room, but it wouldn't fit through our door... next year we'll include a chainsaw on the list.)

7 ■ **Monster Cable Director AV 4.1 A/V Input Selector** $349
http://www.monstercable.com/entech/index.html Switch between your VCR, DVD, Digital Recorder, and Xbox with this high performance audio/video input source selector that actually enhances signals.

8 ■ **Sennheiser RS65 Wireless Headphones** $145 Not available yet in the US, but coming soon. Great sound, comfortable feel, and no wires!

9 ■ **Near-complete collection of Simpson action figures...**
A touch of geekiness helps liven up any Xbox game room.

10 ■ ***Metal Gear Solid X* shrine**
Burn a candle for hope.

11 ■ **Personal desktop fan**
$24.95 www.sharperimage.com
Warning: After more than 36 hours of gaming, no fan can move the stench.

12 ■ **Hot+Cold Snack Box**
$99.95 www.sharperimage.com
It can either keep sodas cool or warm your snacks to a tepid 140 degrees. We love to keep our fresh Krispy Kremes nice and warm...

13 ■ **Nougat is scientifically proven to be good for gaming.**

14 ■ **Cold sodas for a quick caffeine rush.**

15 ■ **Toaster and Pop-Tarts**
Hot breakfast, just like Grandma Dixie used to make.

16 ■ **Snacks**
Should never be out of arm's reach.

17 ■ **Real food** For the rare kinds of nutrition that Pop-Tarts, chips, and candy bars just can't provide.

18 ■ **Emergency sodas**

19 ■ **One year of Official Xbox Magazine** $24.95
www.officialxboxmagazine.com
Even we're embarrassed by this sort of shameless self-promotion.

20 ■ **Xbox Debug Kit (sorry, for developers only)**
Mmmm... see-through green Xbox.

21 ■ **First aid kit**
The pink stuff for long gaming marathons, and bandages for sore thumbs.

22 ■ **Extra game pads**
$39.99 You never know who's going to drop by.

■ **THE ACTUAL COOLEST THING ON THIS PAGE:** is R.O.B. – even though, earlier this year, we did note that "all it could do was pick things up, swing around on its plastic hips, and drop things – like an old man buying chicken at a supermarket."

■ **LIQUID BREAD:** For those readers who are over 21 years of age and fond of the occasional drink (or the occasional binge-drinking session), may we suggest replacing sodas with a delicious micro-brew for maximum game-room goodness.

Best in class

While creating your own Xbox set-up, it's wise to check out some examples of the products that we love. The following are three great audiovisual set-ups that are guaranteed to raise the grade of your Xbox game room.



The TV

Our choice: RCA 36-inch digital high-resolution TV
$1699
http://www.rca.com/product/viewdetail/0,2588,PI45059-CI207,00.html?

There was a time (and we're talking, like, ten years ago, and not during the Great War) when American TVs were humongous, 800-pound, "wood"-sided, evil-smelling, cathode-burning fishbowls whose one saving grace was the fact that each one produced enough excess heat to warm a Minnesota mansion, and enough static electricity to fry anyone dumb enough to steal it. But times have changed, and now the Zeniths and RCAs of this world are no longer a source of shame and eyesore.

For a number of reasons, we chose the RCA 36-inch digital high-resolution TV as our Xbox best. The two main reasons were its price (a relatively reasonable $1699) and the sheer flexibility of the set. With seven AV input sockets, you can connect practically every device you own simultaneously, including a PC or Macintosh, thanks to the inclusion of a VGA port. The set's 1080i-capable resolution is exactly what's needed for videogame HDTV support, so no worries there. A three-line digital comb filter has a startling effect on standard S-video signals for a way-better-than WEGA picture. And yes, it's perfect for progressive-scan DVD watching – movies look staggering on this set.

If it weren't for its 190-pound girth, this would be a perfect solution (do not set it atop that empty beer case in your dorm room). As it is, it's a stunning surprise from an old American establishment (now owned and operated by giant French conglomerate Thomson Multimedia. Ahem). The speakers are great, but don't use 'em – Xbox deserves its own home-theater sound system.

Remote control

Our choice: Yamaha RAV-2000 Intelligent Remote Control
$499
http://www.yamaha.com/yec/products/RAV2000/ravinteract.htm

As home-entertainment systems become more diverse, more complex, and more numerous, so does the collection of remote-control units littering your coffee table. Without going into too much detail, let's just say that certain girlfriends have had enough, and made certain threats to certain editors about certain privileges. Either the remotes went, or certain girlfriends did. Thank goodness, then, for Yamaha.

The Japanese motorcycle/piano/jetbike manufacturer also has a rather nice line of AV equipment, and now introduces the RAV-2000 remote. Xbox owners who've invested in the DVD kit can easily and quickly program the RAV-2000 to learn the Xbox DVD commands, and at a press of the touch-sensitive, backlit LCD screen, switch to control every other device in the house. Most codes are actually built into the machine, and we couldn't even find a device obscure enough to baffle the built-in code database, and believe us, we've got some weird crap here. In fact, the RAV's only drawback is the – take a deep breath, now – $499 price point.

The sound system

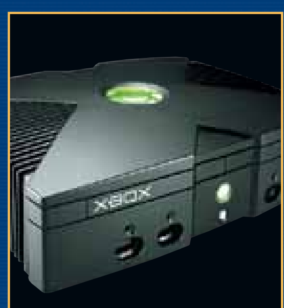
Our choice:Yamaha RP-U200
Receiver: $449
Speakers: $199
http://www.yamaha.com

The RP-U200 is a remarkably fully-featured, Dolby Digital- and DTS-capable monster that will hook up nicely with a wide range of speakers. For convenience, quality, and aesthetics, we've paired it with the Yamaha NSP 220 front, rear, center, and subwoofer package.

The cool thing about the RP-U200 is that it has been built from the ground up as a gaming system. That means that as well as the usual DSP audio modes (church, movie theater, etc.), there's a finely honed *game* mode that balances and sharpens videogame audio to suit the most discerning ear. In short, it more than takes care of both game and movie requirements, it is an absurdly over-qualified receiver for CDs, mini-discs, MP3s, or whatever.

The RP also includes a USB port – so you can customize your Xbox settings in a brilliantly intuitive user interface that lets you "describe" your room and find the best settings to suit your environment.

2001



Key Xbox set-up innovation: The Xbox

Key gaming advantage: All the good stuff has finally been invented

Key gaming disadvantage: Where's our hovertoilet? Pausing to "go" just doesn't cut it

The Future



Key Xbox set-up innovation: The hovertoilet

Key gaming advantage: Holographic technology will make 3D gaming really 3D

Key gaming disadvantage: Now where's our *turbo* hovertoilet?

TOILET FUN: In Scotland (and other places) in the Middle Ages, housewives would toss out bucketfuls of human waste directly from the window, yelling, "Gardez Loo!" Rumors that this instigated the Dark Ages are probably true.



Reviews

The definitive source for Xbox reviews

They're here! They're here!

Yes, dear readers, that glorious time has finally arrived. The time when the Console Fairy sprinkles brand-new games and systems onto all the good boys and girls out there in Xbox-land. And what does that mean? It means Ultra-Honest Reviews™ in our pages to help you decide which games to blow your hard-earned cash on and which games to scare children with! We review a whopping 13 launch titles to assist your game-buying needs come November 15. While not all launch games were available for review by press time, you can be sure that we cover some of the biggest (and best) ones of the bunch: *Dead or Alive 3*, *Halo*, and *Madden 2002*. So, read on to transform yourself into one of the few, the proud, the knowledgeable Xbox owners.

How we score

10 – 8.5 Only the best and the brightest score in this range. If a game scores 9.0 or above, then there's no guessing involved. Buy it, love it, and watch as other games follow in its footsteps.

8.4 – 7.0 Just shy of greatness, but still an exceptional experience.

6.9 – 5.0 There's a bit of entertainment to be found, but something's amiss.

4.9 – 2.0 Rushed, poorly executed, or maybe just tired. Only fools dare tread further.

1.9 – 0.0 Craptacular goodness that is proud to call *Fantastic Four* (PSOne) or *Superman* (N64) its superiors.



The Xbox Elite

Any game that scores 9.0 or higher will be stamped with our Xbox Elite Award. This mark guarantees a solid game to be had by all (all that have $50, of course). So buy it already.

contents

Highlight

The ability to play through every single-player mission in two-player cooperative mode (either split screen or with a dual Xbox set-up) is one of *Halo*'s best features. When you and your buddy hop in the Warthog and start blowing away aliens, you really get an entirely new game.

Halo

WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!

The hype didn't even do it justice

DEVELOPER **BUNGIE** | PUBLISHER **MICROSOFT** | MULTIPLAYER **1-16** | WEBSITE **WWW.XBOX.COM/GAMES/ACTION/HALO.HTM**
EXTRAS **1-2 player co-op mode, 1-4 deathmatch splitscreen, 16 players via system link (four systems, four players per TV, four copies of the game)**

Honestly, I had mixed expectations when the time finally came to review Xbox's eternally-hyped "killer app." I remember *Halo* from the very beginning, when an early PC demo came from nowhere to become the surprise sensation at the 1999 Electronic Entertainment Expo – it had virtually every journalist in attendance rushing around telling anybody who'd listen that they *had* to go check it out. When I finally saw it, I wasn't disappointed – while the gameplay was still in early concept stages, the images of futuristic commandos rushing around a lush sci-fi landscape in vehicles and on foot were light years beyond anything I'd seen. I knew right there and then that this was a game I'd be counting the hours to completion.

When Microsoft later acquired *Halo*'s developer Bungie and announced that the game would be moving from the PC to Xbox, I had some misgivings. The 3D action genre of which *Halo* is a proud member evolved on the PC, where high-speed, precision aiming and maneuvering is made possible by the mouse. Having played console ports of other first-person shooters, I knew that the transition to a joypad control scheme rarely works well, if at all. Even given the dizzying array of multiple sticks and buttons on the Xbox pad, I was skeptical that the complex control *Halo* needed could survive the transition. And I'll admit it, as an old PC die-hard, I worried the game might be "dumbed down" for console, or that the graphics wouldn't be as shiny as the ones that first dazzled me way back when.

Fast-forward to the present… The finished *Halo* is here, and having played it to exhaustion, I'm disappointed. Disappointed that I wasted all that time and energy





MR. SPARKLE: *Halo* is the first game (that we remember) to feature the now-increasingly-common sparkle effect seen on distant ocean vistas. It's also used well in Konami's *AirForce Delta Storm*.

HALO, DARKNESS, MY OLD FRIEND: *Halo* started life as a product for the new, games-capable Mac G4 series, but after Microsoft bought Bungie, things changed for the better (unless you are a Mac gamer still toiling away on *WarCraft 2*).




The holographic hottie who gives you advice appears to have a crush on you, and romantic tension is high.

worrying it wouldn't live up to the hype. It absolutely does. I believe *Halo* is, without question, the best game for the Xbox and a very serious contender for best game of 2001 on any format.

Fusing hoary old sci-fi clichés with some impressively original concepts, *Halo*'s story casts you as a cybernetic US Marine super-commando stationed aboard a space battleship. Retreating from the enemy – a monstrous race known as the Covenant – the ship performs an emergency hyperspace jump and finds itself in an uncharted area of space, in orbit around an immense ring-like structure supporting an entire artificial ecosystem. When your ship is destroyed by the pursuing Covenant, you and the rest of

I'm disappointed that I wasted all that time and energy worrying it wouldn't live up to the hype

the ship's complement of Marines are forced to bail out and crash-land on the mysterious ring-world, with Covenant forces hot on your tail. To give away any more of the plot would spoil the surprise, as the game's story unfolds beautifully in cut-scenes between (and during) each of the 10 missions; suffice it to say that you'll quickly discover that the Covenant are the least of your problems on this strange new world…

Ten missions might not sound like a lot, but each one is a huge, sprawling enterprise broken down by multiple objectives, unforeseen twists and turns, and, mercifully, numerous save points. Each level mixes elements of puzzle-solving and exploration, since some parts of the maps have maze-like qualities – but make no mistake, *Halo*'s prime mover is combat. You're unlikely to ever spend more than 30 seconds in this gameworld without being shot at by *something*. But thanks to a tremendous arsenal and some delicious AI on both sides, you'll have a helluva fun time shooting back. The weapons at your disposal are many

Halo multiplay

***Halo* comes equipped with an impressive array of multiplayer options, including a cooperative mode that allows players to take on any of the game's 10 missions together. The missions play out the same, but you'll be able to pull off some nifty tag-team techniques on some of the tougher aliens. In addition, there are no fewer than 26 (count 'em) styles of competitive multiplay, including standard Deathmatch, Capture the Flag, Assault, and the excellent Oddball, in which teams fight for possession of a human skull (don't ask). You can also tinker with the rules to create your own custom games. *Halo* allows for as many as four players to compete on a single Xbox in split-screen mode, and for as many as four Xbox systems to be connected via Ethernet, for a grand total of 16 players. And that's some serious deathmatchin'.**

The ride of your life

***Halo* provides an array of land and air vehicles to jump into and control – our favorites are the huge human tank called the Scorpion and the Ghost, a sleek Covenant jetfighter – and they mix up the action nicely in both single- and multi-player. Here's a quick guide to a few of them and where we had the most fun with them:**

WARTHOG

When they say all-terrain vehicle, they mean it. There's virtually no hill this puppy can't handle with ease, and there's extra room inside for a tail gunner and one other passenger to provide additional fire support.

IN-GAME HIGHLIGHT:
Jumping inside an enemy Warthog in the middle of a multi-player game and shooting up the passengers while they try to figure out where the hell they are getting shot from.

SCORPION

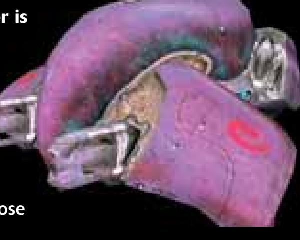
The Marines' tank is a serious piece of hardware, packing a heavy machine gun, a devastating main cannon, and slots on the chassis for extra Marines to jump on and fire from.

IN-GAME HIGHLIGHT:
Co-op mode. One player at the wheel and cannon, the other riding on the side with a fully-loaded rocket launcher. Alien blood everywhere!

GHOST

The Covenants' primary air fighter is sleek, agile, and packs a punch. Expect its speed and maneuver-ability to be a big factor in multiplay.

IN-GAME HIGHLIGHT:
Shoot down a Covenant without destroying the Ghost. Then hop in and start taking out those pesky aliens from above.



TRAINING DAY: The *Halo* training sequence is brilliantly woven into the plot, never slowing the pace of the action from the instant you press start – there's even a good excuse for switching your controller axis.





Shoot a Covenant soldier and you can pick up its weapon.

and varied (see sidebar, page 91), but in a clever and logical touch, the game breaks with genre tradition by not letting you lug around every weapon you come across. You're only allowed to carry two weapons (plus grenades) at a time, so you'll often have to make crucial decisions about what to abandon and what to take with you.

One thing you'll always be glad to have with you, however, are your fellow Marines. They're a cut above the usual AI buddies who never seem to have enough sense to keep themselves alive for long. These guys can fight, and they can talk some serious trash, too – their context-sensitive dialogue lends a genuinely immersive quality to *Halo*; it actually seems like you're fighting alongside real people.

This feeling of "being there" is *Halo*'s best and most pervasive quality. The entire experience is imbued with a cinematic style that makes you feel like you're the hero of an epic action-adventure story, not merely playing a videogame. There are moments of intense, Bruckheimer-esque, "I can't believe I just saw that happen" action, and palpable, white-knuckle tension and fear. It should be noted that *Halo*, in many of these techniques, owes a debt of gratitude to the PC classic *Half-Life*, which redefined the genre by setting new standards for cinematic tension and in-game storytelling. But it should also be noted that, in a genre that has been trying desperately (and failing) since 1998 to produce a worthy heir to *Half-Life*, *Halo* is the first game to come along that really deserves the accolade.

Technically, for sure – *Halo*'s without doubt the best-looking game I've ever seen, both technically and in terms of artistic achievement. As an example, when you stand in the verdant forest of *Halo*'s first level and see the huge arcs of the circular landscape extending up into infinity in either direction, it's an awe-inspiring moment.

The soundtrack, meanwhile, is worthy of a spin-off CD, from the Gregorian chanting of the opening screen to the heart-pounding incidental music and ever-present ambient sounds. Oh, and that control scheme? After about an hour or two, the dual-analog movement and aiming is as instinctive and natural as you could hope for.

This, then, is *Halo*, for my money the best game of the year on any system. From top to bottom, it's just a stunning, stunning achievement. Seventy reasons why you have to get an Xbox? Pah. As of right now, you only need one.

– Gary Whitta

■ Each player on the tank pictured can be controlled either by a human player, or by computer AI. It's revolutionary stuff.

Yeah, what he said

We love second opinions. You love second opinions. Unfortunately, we couldn't find anybody in the office (or the streets of San Francisco) who could disagree with the review and the overall greatness of *Halo*. But in case Microsoft needs any more material for advertisements, here are more gushing remarks.

FRANK: Since Valve refuses to make *Half-Life 2*, I'll have to be content with something much, much better. *Halo*. It's worth buying a spare Xbox for.

MIKE: Astonishing. Spellbinding. Stunning. And another synonym for "damn good." This is the best first-person shooter I've ever played on any system. Period.

DAN: They had to rip *Halo* out of my hands. Next time, I'm holding on tighter. I can literally play two-player co-op mode all day and night.

DAVE: *Halo* is a brilliant piece of work that delicately balances the capabilities of the Xbox to produce a game that is far advanced over the competition. Finally, we have a game that surpasses the seemingly unbeatable *Half-Life*, and it's only on Xbox.

FRANCESCA: While it's an overused word in gaming, I'd have to agree with Gary and say that *Halo* is incredibly "immersive." It's like jumping into a really well written sci-fi novel. Even though it seems to skew on the "PC" side, the gameplay is amazingly tight.



The alien AI is so good, you can see them react to new situations.

Halo Weapons

***Halo* delivers a mean arsenal of US Marine weaponry, plus you can pick up alien weapons from the bodies of dead Covenant troops. Some of the best:**

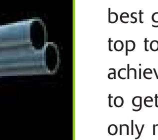
ASSAULT RIFLE
Reminiscent of the M-41A Pulse Rifle from *Aliens*, this baby comes with a 60-round clip and a dazzling rate of fire. It's a good idea to keep this ready to rock in one of your two weapons slots at all times.

SNIPER RIFLE
Equipped with two zoom modes and a night-vision scope, this one-shot killer is a great way to take out enemies without getting your hands dirty. Just don't try to use it up close.

PLASMA PISTOL
The standard sidearm of lower-rank Covenant troops, this single-shot repeater is most effective when you hold the trigger down for one big powerful burst of energy. Booyah!

NEEDLER
Our personal favorite, this Covenant weapon shoots out waves of razor-sharp glass needles that home in on a target and then explode. Bad, real bad.

ROCKET LAUNCHER
With very limited ammunition and a slow reload time, you'll only want to use this in very special situations, but when faced with overwhelmingly superior forces, this explosive beauty is just the job.



THE VERDICT

Graphics
Astonishing. Everything in the game, from the backdrops to the aliens and weapons, boasts a high level of detail and imagination. Tremendous lighting effects and other eye-popping SFX are the icing on the cake.

Immersion
The impressive AI, dialogue, scripted sequences, and slow-burning storyline all conspire to make you feel like you're inside a megabudget sci-fi movie. Play it with the lights down and Dolby 5.1 sound way up for maximum effect.

Sound
The haunting title track and powerful in-game music draws you into *Halo*'s gameworld, while the sound effects, from weapons fire to the roar of the aliens, are rich, meaty, and often very scary. But nothing compares to the constant and varied banter from fellow Marines.

Design
Well-constructed levels, challenging enemies (at four levels of difficulty), thoughtful puzzles, and a wide variety of situations will keep you glued to your pad. In pure design terms, *Halo* is the most expertly-constructed confection since the awesome *Half-Life*.

GOOD (+), BAD (–), PERPLEXING (?)
+ Aliens and background damage don't disappear after a while, which gives a good sense of carnage and helps you figure out where you've already been.
+ Stunning physics allow for some great grenade kills, including chain reactions that will blast enemies all over the room.
– It's possible to get lost and confused on some of the more complex levels – an automap function might've been helpful here.
– Three- and four-player split-screen can be unsatisfying on all but the biggest TVs. Better to bring more than one Xbox to the party.



■ **TWISTS AND TURNS:** The *Halo* plot, which borrows heavily from sci-fi sources galore, is deep and compelling enough that Microsoft actually swore us to secrecy on many plot points. Hint: nothing is as it seems, or so it seems.

■ **YOU MAY REMEMBER:** The illustrious Gary Whitta from such publications as the US and UK versions of *PC Gamer*, *Computer and Video Games*, *Total Movie*, and *Popular Computing Weekly*. His favorite food is bubble-and-squeak.

Sure, it's more of the same, but in this case, it's *much* more of the same, with five new levels, new tricks, and some weird secret stuff that *Hawk* fans will simply have to have.

Bomb da bass

Hey, before you pop *Tony Hawk 2X* into your Xbox, why not make a mix of your favorite CD tracks? You can simply pop a CD in and rip it to the Xbox hard-drive MP3-style, although in reality, the tracks are encoded as secure Windows Media Audio, encrypted and locked down. You can edit and delete them, but you can't post 'em to the Internet, Napster-style. Our first test was with a classical guitar collection (don't ask), and it actually changed the mood of the game pretty dramatically, making for a more mellow and less-rushed-seeming experience. You can achieve the opposite effect by ripping some speed metal to the soundtrack.

The "x" stands for best skateboarding game. Ever.

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2x

ON THE GAME DISC
Movie
Wanna see this baby in motion? Complete with volumetric grass, high-res textures, and much better polygonal character builds? Then just pop the exclusive Xbox Game Disc in a suitable DVD player and enjoy.

DEVELOPER **TREYARCH/NEVERSOFT** | PUBLISHER **ACTIVISION**
MULTIPLAYER **1-4 VIA LAN OR SPLIT-SCREEN** | WEBSITE **WWW.ACTIVISION.COM**

It's impossible to review this game without at least acknowledging the existence of *Tony Hawk 3*. It's lurking like a specter (a specter of goodness, mind you) on the horizon. *TH3* on Xbox ships some way into next year, though, so breath-holders might bust their colons waiting (the thought of which disgusts us). So we suggest you take a look at *Tony Hawk 2x* and this review, since both are full of welcome surprises.

So what makes *Tony Hawk 2* so "*x*"? Well, the four-player split-screen mode, for one thing. Graphics so sharp that on any decent-sized TV, the graphics aren't simply sharp – they're almost as clear as the single-player modes on other, lesser games. And it's smooth to boot. Quite simply, it makes the multiplayer experience accessible and workable in a way that it never was in previous iterations of the game.

And then there're the new levels. Lots of them. Forget the inclusion (and expansion) of every level from *Tony Hawks 1* and *2*; this game actually comes complete with five all-new "*2x*" levels – specifically, a neon-lit London nightclub, a New York subway, a construction site, a new skate park, and most impressively, a stunning Detroit rooftop level, vertiginously planned and damned frightening to skate on.

These new levels aren't simply tagged on – they're complete, well-executed, and, in some cases, superior to existing *Hawk* levels. The Detroit Rooftop level is now firmly my favorite and a multiplayer fave in the office, too. The trick system is taken directly from *Tony Hawk 2* – with all those tricks available in the *TH1, 2,* and *2x* levels. In fact, most of the game's skeletal structure, including the skate shop, play modes, and even hidden cheats, is taken from *TH2*. There are a couple of *2x*-specific hidden goodies, though….



This shot shows two players competing head-to-head over a LAN. In this case, simply by plugging into our office LAN.

Mano-a-LAN-o

Although the two-, three-, and four-player split screen is not only playable, but arguably the most brilliant implementation of that feature to date, full-screen LAN games are what it's really all about. You can connect two Xbox units with a straight Ethernet cable – or, better yet, over a LAN (the Xbox should simply detect the other Xbox systems on the LAN). That way, you don't need two Xbox units and two TVs in the same room. We hope that next year will bring this or similar experiences to the Internet.



It is a wee bit disappointing that the Create-a-Park mode hasn't been particularly enhanced. It's faster and easier to use than before, but no more flexible or expansive. However, the capacious hard-drive does mean you can have more custom parks at your disposal.

All in all, it's the most complete *Tony Hawk* experience to date, with more than enough extras to supplant any feelings of cynicism regarding the repackaging of old goods. It's huge, it's pretty, and it'll do more than just keep your appetite whetted until *Tony Hawk 3* shows up. This is the absolute best version of *Tony Hawk* ever made, and if you've played any of the earlier versions, then you know it is plenty good enough.

– Frank O'Connor



The combination of *Tony Hawk 1* and *2* is more than just a glue job – the way the moves, skaters, and levels interact means new strategies.

Existing areas have had more than simple graphic tweaks – some have new, more revealing backgrounds, while others have completely new secret areas to explore.

THE VERDICT

Graphics
Bump-mapped textures? Check. Volumetric grass? Check. Clever lighting? Check. Everything you expected and more, including new animation, and draw distances that reveal more level than you ever suspected was there. Solid, impressive, but not amazing.

Immersion
Tony Hawk at its heart isn't about progress, or even scoring: it's about a near-magical process of enabling – skaters can achieve improbable feats, soar to incredible heights, and do nine hundred impossible things before breakfast – kinda like the Marines, but with skateboards.

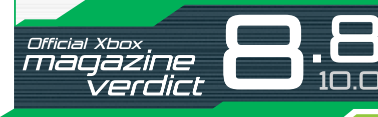
Sound
Familiar *Tony Hawk* tracks are somewhat overshadowed by the new samples and sound effects, and backed up by a host of phat new beats and bangin' choons. Skatepunks may be somewhat offended by the bleeps and whistles of techno, but there is a disco level, for goodness sake. So it makes sense.

Design
Only two of the best-designed games ever, glued seamlessly together and wearing a big flowery hat of extra-ness. The classic interface is there, and the implementation of new tricks in an old game is surprisingly novel and adds some rich twists to the old chestnut.

GOOD (+), BAD (–), PERPLEXING (?)
+ The inclusion of new levels and the expansion of old answers the question: *Do I need this, too?* The weird recombination of *Tonys 1* and *2* is what makes this stand up on its own.

– Well, there's certainly an element of repetition, and the character builds and density of world population may still seem a little primitive to those who've witnessed the busy streets of *Tony Hawk 3*.

? What if *Tony Hawk 3* came out in six months – would you still want this?



THE TRUTH ABOUT OLLIES: The "ollie" was invented by Alan Ollie Gelfand. The trick is a leap into the air during which the board stays flush with the feet. "Ollie" North was that guy who lied a lot and looked a bit like Treat Williams.

1080 DEGREES OF SEPARATION: If Atari's classic *720* coin-op had come out now, post-Tony's amazing 900 feat, they'd have had to call it *1080*. And then Nintendo would be pissed….

Washed, waxed, and ready to roll

Project Gotham Racing

DEVELOPER **BIZARRE CREATIONS** | PUBLISHER **MICROSOFT** | MULTIPLAYER **1-4**
WEBSITE **WWW.MICROSOFT.COM/GAMES/PROJECTGOTHAM**

There's some pretty serious pressure attached to being an Xbox launch title. Especially when you're a much-ballyhooed racing game that's expected to leave the PS2's standard-bearing *Gran Turismo 3* choking on your high-resolution exhaust fumes. *Project Gotham Racing* manages to pull it off, however, as even the most rabid *GT3* fanatics would be hard-pressed to see their darling match up with Microsoft's new racer for graphics, sound, and overall wow factor.

Not that the Sony title really had much of a chance. With the CPU and graphical muscle of the Xbox behind it, *Gotham* delivers an audiovisual experience quite unlike anything that has ever come before it. The spectacle includes insanely detailed car renderings (featuring over 16,000 polys per vehicle), animated drivers, lifelike weather effects, and some of the most convincing environment-mapping reflections outside of your local hot wax shop.



Sure, there are fewer cars than in GT3, but how many Hyundais do you need?



Let's see, rich brick textures? Check. Hazy distant skyline? Check. Gleaming, perfect car models? Check. Now all we need are trees and a bridge...

And what an environment! The urban thoroughfares of Tokyo, London, San Francisco, and New York have been reproduced with uncompromising precision, from the volumetric steam escaping from subway grates right down to the correct placement of billboards on the game's hundreds of real-life buildings and structures. Toss an unflagging 60 fps game speed into the mix and the sense of immersion is total.

Developer Bizarre Creations also recorded real-time audio from each of the 29 cars featured in the game to enhance *Gotham*'s incredibly lush sound environment. The authentic wail of a Ferrari 360 Spider screaming at full revs now complements an ambitious soundtrack that showcases more than 50 artists ranging from The Chemical Brothers to David Lee Roth. You can even tune your car's radio to an FM station appropriate to the city you're racing in or rip your own tunes directly to the hard-drive.

What the heck's a Feroce?



It may not boast the raw horsepower of a Dodge Viper RT/10, but the English-built Delfino Feroce (that's right, despite the exotic name, this beauty is built in the good old U.K.) is one of the sweetest pieces of machinery that you'll encounter in the game. This all-wheel drive, 280-horsepower dream car will transport you around any of *Gotham*'s 200-plus circuits with a level of adhesion and outright driveability that will have the other vehicles spinning their wheels just trying to keep up. It may take a little time to unlock it, but when you do, it'll be tough to wipe that goofy smile off your face.

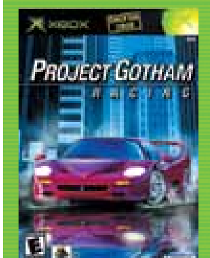


Replay angles are worth racing for.



Starting with a Ferrari makes sense to us.

Gotham's changing skyline



Microsoft and Bizarre were so excited about the inclusion of New York City in *Project Gotham Racing* (supplementing the trio of cities that were featured in *MSR* for the Dreamcast) that the box art for the game was drawn up to prominently feature the NYC skyline (complete with the World Trade Center) in the background. Since the tragic events of September 11, all representations of the WTC towers have been removed – both on the cover art and in the game itself.

Gotham is more than just sound and imagery, however. Ostensibly an enhanced version of Bizarre's earlier Dreamcast classic – *Metropolis Street Racer* – it also delivers one of the deepest gameplay premises of any console racer today. The "kudos" system that first appeared in *MSR* has been significantly tweaked here to reward skill as much as *Tony Hawk*-style flair during races. And, with over 100 Kudos Challenges and over 200 gorgeous circuit layouts to master, the experience is best measured in months, rather than weeks or days. Some superior AI coding gives the single-player game even more legs, while up to four people can also indulge in some split-screen multiplayer action.

There has to be a downside, though, right? Well, yes and no. The chief complaint that is likely to surface is the absolute poverty of vehicles in *Project Gotham* compared to the stable of 150 found in *GT3*. While it's true that a selection of 29 cars hardly constitutes a magnum opus, the phrase "quality over quantity" clearly applies here. A mouthwatering selection of Ferraris, Porsches, BMWs, and Audis are at the core of this collection, and, while not blessed with the advanced driving physics and "tweakability" of *GT3*'s cars, each machine is still quite a treat to powerslide through the concrete canyons of New York or Tokyo. What's more, the participating manufacturers have even permitted some unprecedented damage effects to be applied to their precious steeds (albeit a visual-only model that doesn't impact performance in any way).

Pretty minor caveats in the grand scheme of things, however, because when you get right down to it, *Project Gotham Racing* hits the streets as a highly immersive and richly textured Xbox racing game that manages to measure up to anything else on the console market – *GT3* included.

– Andy Mahood



Graphics
In a word – stunning! Painstakingly authentic cityscapes, 16,000 polys per car, and reflective environment mapping raise the eye-candy bar so high that it's impossible to count the calories.

Immersion
If you're a racing fanatic, then there is a significant danger that you will play this game to the exclusion of everything (and everybody) else in your life. That might not be good.

Sound
The cacophonous wail of an honest-to-god Ferrari F50 screaming out through your five-speaker surround sound system while the radio blares.

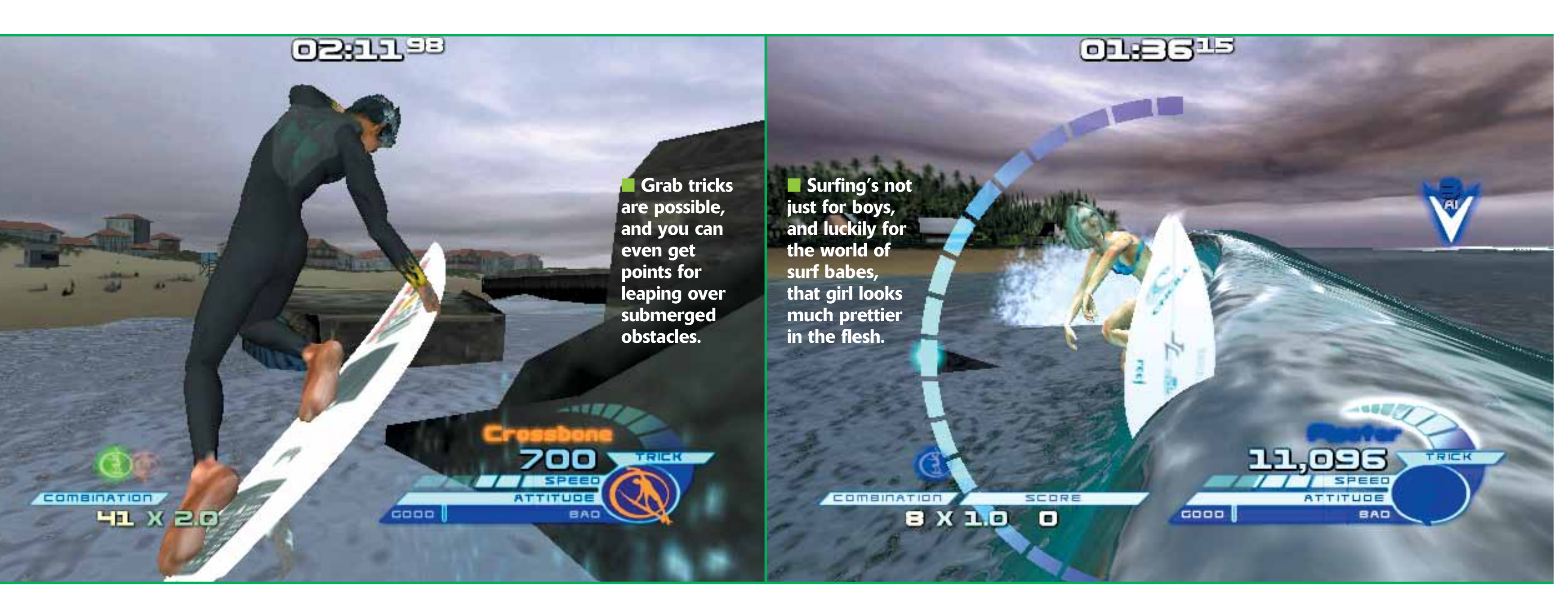
Design
No open country roads to relieve the urban claustrophobia, but for a street racer, the gameplay options are exhaustive.

(+) Good, (–) Bad, (?) Perplexing
+ Gobsmacking graphics.
+ Lush sound.
+ Solid AI.
+ Immense gameplay depth.
– Fewer than 30 cars.
– Simplified physics.
– Damage effects are cosmetic only.
? With only 29 cars to render, you figure they should've been able to throw in a proper in-car dashboard view.

Official Xbox magazine verdict
9.0 / 10.0

■ **LITTLE-KNOWN FACT:** Andy Mahood, the author of this review, has more than 17 collective years of pro-racing cred. He has competed in Formula Ford, Formula Atlantic, and Player's/GM Motorsport series events and driven all sorts of exotic cars.

■ **ACCORDING TO DICTIONARY.COM:** The name "Gotham" refers to "New York City. The nickname was popularized by Washington Irving and others in Salmagundi, a series of satirical sketches (1807-1808)." Eat your heart out, Batman.



Grab tricks are possible, and you can even get points for leaping over submerged obstacles.

Surfing's not just for boys, and luckily for the world of surf babes, that girl looks much prettier in the flesh.

The fun of surfing without all that sand in your pants

TransWorld Surf

DEVELOPER **ANGEL STUDIOS** | PUBLISHER **INFOGRAMES**
MULTIPLAYER **1-4** | WEBSITE **WWW.TRANSWORLDGAMES.COM**

Let's talk for a minute about the rich history of surfing games… oooh, wait a second, there *is* no rich history of surfing games. In fact, until now, surfing games have generally stunk. So how about we forget the past and kick off a new rich history with *TransWorld Surf*?

It's an appropriate beginning because we're likely to see a bunch of clones of this title in the future. Like *Tony Hawk* before it, *TransWorld Surf* has introduced a way to make surfing in videogames fun, and others will definitely follow. (Let's be honest, though: the core of the gameplay was cribbed from Tony himself.) Numerous challenges, an intuitive trick layout, and tight control add up to a game that perfectly fits the tired cliché "easy to pick up and almost impossible to put down."

When you start, you'll be lucky to string a single combo together without wiping out, but before long, you'll be a pro. For the most part, you'll learn your skills while opening new levels. They're smartly designed to gradually teach you new tricks and challenge you to improve slowly.

What we like best about this game, though, is that the developers seemed to have fun making it. The game is packed with cool stuff such as sea creatures galore, surfer-hungry sharks, and a reef girl who will hit on you if you're doing well and treat you with shameless disgust if your surfing "karma" drops too low.

The actual gameplay is so fun and addictive that we almost forgot the stunning graphics. *TransWorld Surf* won't always convince you that you're looking at real water, but it comes as close as any surfing game we've seen before. We guarantee you've never seen breaking waves look (or sound) this good in a game before. And we guarantee you've never played a surfing game this fun either.

– Dan Egger



Free them. Don't compete with them.

Best surfing game ever?

Fans of retro gaming will know this before we even begin. The best surfing game (before this one, that is) was actually a sub-game in Epyx's *California Games* for the Atari Lynx color handheld system. Not only was the game incredibly fun and simple to pick up, but the water effects produced on the weirdly powerful Lynx were unmatched. To this day, the game is still played on emulators in this very office. It is, to borrow a phrase, totally radical, man.

THE VERDICT

Graphics The waves look incredibly real, but the character models are merely Dreamcast caliber.

Immersion It made a bunch of land-loving editors feel like they were actually surfing and the depth in play kept us coming back for more.

Sound If you've got a good sound system and a nice bass amp, you'll actually feel the big waves.

Design A lot of the design is similar to *Tony Hawk*, but we're not complaining because it absolutely works.

(+) Good, (–) Bad, (?) Perplexing
+ Great waves.
+ Excellent gameplay.
– Sometimes the level goals are confusing.
– The surfers look awful when compared to the beautiful environments.
? How come girls are so mean to me?



SHARK ATTACK: The sharks seen in the San Francisco Fort Point level of *TransWorld Surf* are only a couple of miles from reality, since the nearby Farallon Islands host one of the largest congregations of Great Whites anywhere on Earth.



When he perfected his invention, Sir Edmund Texturemap never suspected it might be used for blatant commercialism.

Go faster and lefter than you ever have before!

NASCAR Heat

DEVELOPER **MONSTER GAMES INC.** | PUBLISHER **INFOGRAMES** | MULTIPLAYER **2-32 VIA SYSTEM LINK**
WEBSITE **US.INFOGRAMES.COM/NASCARHEAT** | EXTRAS: **5.1 DOLBY DIGITAL SOUND**

Really – what's not to love about NASCAR? It features dangerous driving, lots of noise, gas fumes, and the freedom to smoke in public again. And the only thing missing from Infogrames' *NASCAR Heat* is a few of the newer tracks and a pack of Camels (sans filter, of course). Other than that – it smokes.

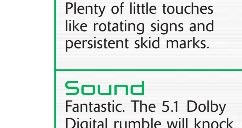
Not everybody's idea of a good time is driving in circles, however. Yet *NASCAR Heat* does an excellent job of reaching out to NASCAR newbies, thanks to its cool "Beat the Heat" challenges. There are 36 different challenges, starting from the ultra-smooth "hold the line" runs, to insane, come-from-behind victories. It's a great way to slowly introduce gamers to the subtleties and strategy of stock car racing.

There are other modes as well, including the simple Single Races, Head-to-Head, and Beat the Pro Challenge. Beating the pro is especially tough, as you compete against a ghost car that is controlled by an actual NASCAR pro. In case you weren't sure how much you sucked, the pros will let you know.

Finally, there is also a Season mode that will let you race for the Winston Cup points championship. The only problem here is that *NASCAR Heat* only features 19 of the 23 actual tracks, so it's not exactly like the real season. And beware of the nasty AI, which makes competitors run perfectly through the pits and fly past you with a lap to go.

The graphics, however, are pretty close to the real thing. All of the cars look simply amazing, and with the addition of damage modeling, they look even more amazing after you've driven them into the wall a few times. Granted, *NASCAR Heat* won't convert people who dislike driving games – or have a fetish for turning right. But for the rest of us, *NASCAR Heat* is a great addition to the Xbox's early collection of racing games.

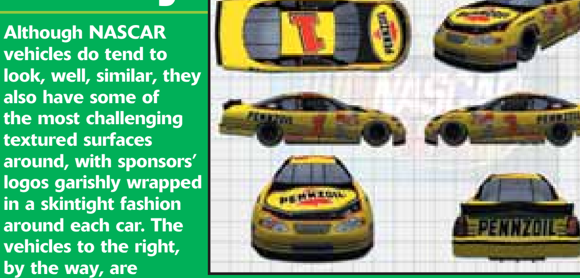
– Jim Preston



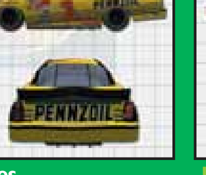
Can't stand the coverage of NASCAR on NBC? There is a solution, ladies and germs. Just pop our exclusive Xbox Game Disc in a suitable DVD player and enjoy a hot movie of the game.

Rich-textured, creamy

Although NASCAR vehicles do tend to look, well, well, similar, they also have some of the most challenging textured surfaces around, with sponsors' logos garishly wrapped in a skintight fashion around each car. The vehicles to the right, by the way, are mechanically identical.




Some Xbox car textures.



Variations on a theme.

THE VERDICT

Graphics Excellent. The tracks are almost photo-real, and the cars look great. Plenty of little touches like rotating signs and persistent skid marks.

Immersion Deep. Although there is no story to get wrapped up with, the controls, audio, and graphics are first-rate.

Sound Fantastic. The 5.1 Dolby Digital rumble will knock that cigarette from your lips. Engine sounds are very realistic.

Design The 36 challenges are a great way to introduce the sport to newcomers. Menus are intuitive and set-up is easy.

GOOD (+), BAD (–), PERPLEXING (?)
+ Great graphics, and an excellent challenge system.
– Doesn't have all the official tracks, and it's tough even on normal difficulty.
? Why would anyone drink Bud out of a can?



OFFICIAL APOLOGY: We'd like to take a moment to apologize for our use of the term "persistent skid marks" (above). Upon further review, it is really quite disgusting, and we fear it could bring back unfortunate memories for some readers.

My so-called life as an abused cartoon wheelman

Cel Damage

ON THE GAME DISC Movie

DEVELOPER **PSEUDO INTERACTIVE** | PUBLISHER **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
MULTIPLAYER **1-4** | WEBSITE **WWW.CELDAMAGE.EA.COM**

Like cotton candy covered in whipped cream and finished off with RC Cola, *Cel Damage* is just too much of a good thing. It is visually spectacular, and the closest we have ever come to playing a Chuck Jones-style cartoon in a videogame. But the gameplay is equally cartoonish, and it soon degrades into a slaphappy frenzy of constant death and respawning. If we didn't have epilepsy before, we just might have it now.

The title *Cel Damage* refers to cel-shading, or the process of making computer graphics look like they are made with traditional, cel-based animation. Previous games like *Jet Grind Radio, Klonoa 2,* and *Wacky Races* have sported the look, but none have ever gotten the rubbery physics down the way *Cel Damage* has.

The problem is that the graphics are the only real hook. The car-combat gameplay is certainly wacky (or even "whacky"), but it is insanely manic and fast, and just about every attack kills you. The result is about 30 or 40 respawns in five minutes of bedlam. You appear, you die, and then you repeat.

It doesn't help that the 12 small levels further add to this battle-in-a-blender feel. There are three different modes (Combat, Gate Relay, and Flag Rally), but they each play almost identically. The Flag Rally, for example, has you capture four flags, then return them to a preset point. But since you die constantly, there is a feeling of never having your fate in your own hands. It's all quite frustrating.

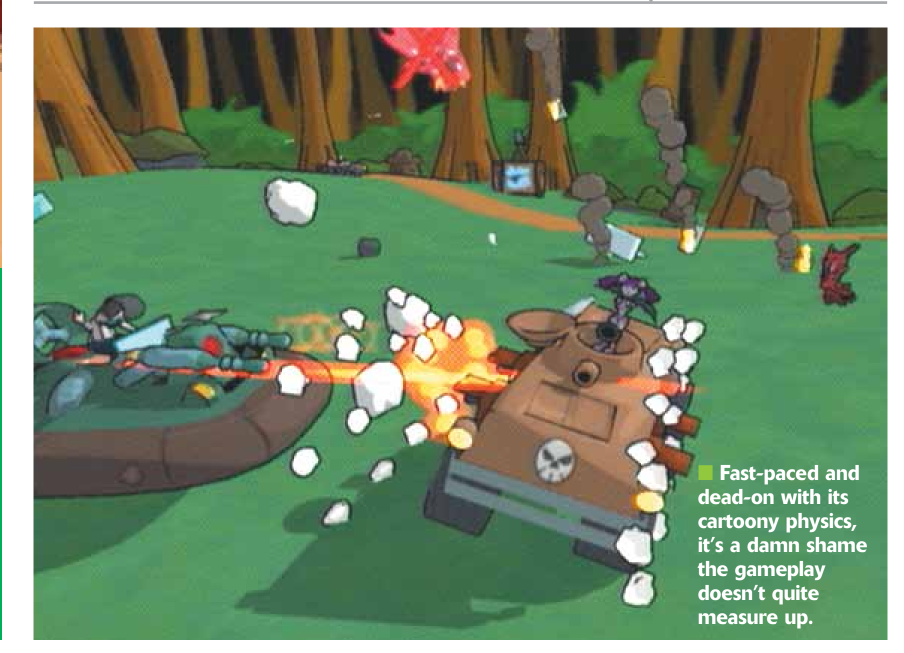


Short-range weapons serve you well in certain stages.

Yet what is even more frustrating is how cool *Cel Damage* could have been. The weapons are great (ranging from a vicious chainsaw to a portable hole), the sound effects and voices are top-notch, and did we mention how damn spiffy those graphics are? But the repetitive, frantic, and rather shallow combat lessens the experience and eventually left me with even more brain-cell damage.

– Jim Preston

A slaphappy frenzy of constant death and respawning.



Fast-paced and dead-on with its cartoony physics, it's a damn shame the gameplay doesn't quite measure up.

Why not...

Instead of just whining, we're going to offer some ideas for the next *Cel Damage*. Aren't we just the swellest.



With some revamping, we wouldn't mind a *Cel Damage 2*.

HAVE DEFENSIVE WEAPONS:
Nothing is more annoying than being defenseless (it reminds us too much of our real lives, thank you).

SLOW IT DOWN:
Fast is great, until it gets to the point that you lose control of the game and don't even get a chance to gander at the stellar graphics.

CHARACTERS INSTEAD OF CARICATURES:
Give us something to relate to and something with a bit of depth, rather than just a combination of clichéd stereotypical cartoon wise-guys.

THE VERDICT

Graphics
Brilliant. No other cel-shaded game has so accurately captured not only the look, but the *motion* of cartoons.

Immersion
Not much. There are funny characters, but no one you ever really care about. It's pure, zany combat.

Sound
Excellent. There are all types of cartoonish thonks!, zaps! and ka-pows! The music is snappy, too (*Ed. note: This is the last time we can ever use the word "snappy"*).

Design
Shallow. Every minute, mode, and movement feels the same. It's all constantly in motion with little feeling of control over your fate.

(+) Good, (–) Bad, (?) Perplexing
+ Superb graphics.
+ Sound design is first rate.
– Gameplay is monotonous.
– Way too frantic.
? All three modes play almost identically.



Official Xbox magazine verdict
6.0 / 10.0

WHAT'S UP, CHUCK: Animation legend Chuck Jones has made more than 300 animated films. Besides giving us Bugs, Daffy, and Elmer, Chuck gets credit for Wile E. Coyote, Roadrunner, and Marvin the Martian – sorry, Chuck, Grandma Dixie is all ours.

Remember when games were so simple anyone could play... and so fun that anyone would?

Fuzion Frenzy

DEVELOPER **BLITZ GAMES, LTD.** | PUBLISHER **MICROSOFT**
MULTIPLAYER **1-4** | WEBSITE **WWW.XBOX.COM**

Small arenas and ruthless opponents put the "frenzy" in *Fuzion Frenzy*. Sorry.

Of all Microsoft's first-party launch titles, *Fuzion Frenzy* is the one that has surprised us the most. Like many gamers, we didn't expect much from this title. After all, party games are pretty much for kids – and the marketing mindset behind this title was so groanworthy (Isn't it the 1000th game to have a title with a misplaced *z* and a cast of Mountain Dew rejects?) that no one can blame us for underestimating it.


Apparently, in the future, we'll all wear platform shoes and bell bottom pants.

But we're big enough to admit when we're wrong. *Fuzion Frenzy* (pardon the *z*) is essentially a collection of small mini-games that owe a great debt to classic arcade gameplay. In fact, playing through it with the staff reminded us of "the old days" (Great Scott, the Eighties!) – all that was really missing was a joystick, feathered hair, and a pocketful of quarters.

Almost every mini-game comes with a single-sentence explanation and two buttons' worth of control. What they lack in complexity, these sub-games make up for in intensity. For instance, one game sets four raft-floating players on a waterfall with the last one to go over the edge losing. The concept is simple, but we could play it 10 times in a row without becoming bored. And there are at least 20 others that are just as addictive.

When played with three other friends, this is perhaps the most accessible game on the Xbox right now. Best of all, the instructions and gameplay concepts are so simple that absolutely anyone can play – even our art staff. That means that even your non-gaming buddies/relatives/girlfriends can fill empty slots... and they'll be hooked before you know it.

Unfortunately, the single-player mode isn't quite as fun and isn't nearly as deep as the classic *Mario Party* series. But this game isn't about single-player action, and if you have friends… *any* friends… there's more than enough fun in this game for you.

– Dan Egger


All of the games in *Fuzion Frenzy* depend on skill more than strategy.

THE VERDICT

Graphics
This game would still work with 8-bit graphics, but it actually looks good side-by-side with other Xbox games.

Immersion
When you're going up against three of your trash-talking friends… you'll be plenty immersed.

Sound
The game sounds are great, but the game could have done without the "wacky" player comments.

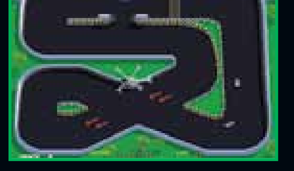
Design
The games are great, but does anyone besides middle-aged guys in suits still believe that "extreme" dudes are cool?

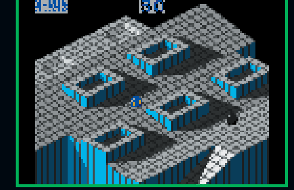
(+) Good, (–) Bad, (?) Perplexing
+ Hopelessly addictive.
+ Can be played and enjoyed by anyone.
– The single-player game is nowhere near as deep as *Mario Party*.

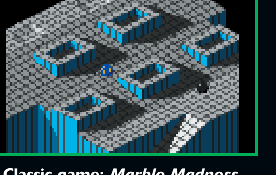
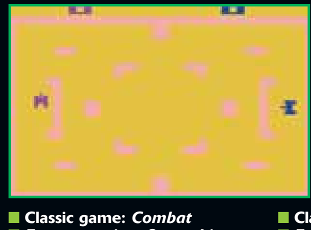
Official Xbox magazine verdict **7.8** / 10.0

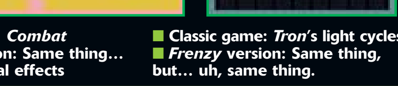
The more things change, the more they stay the same

Fuzion Frenzy **hearkens back to some of the most enjoyable arcade games of all time. This is just a sampling of its heritage:**


Classic game: *Super Sprint*
Frenzy **version: Same thing, but with rafts**

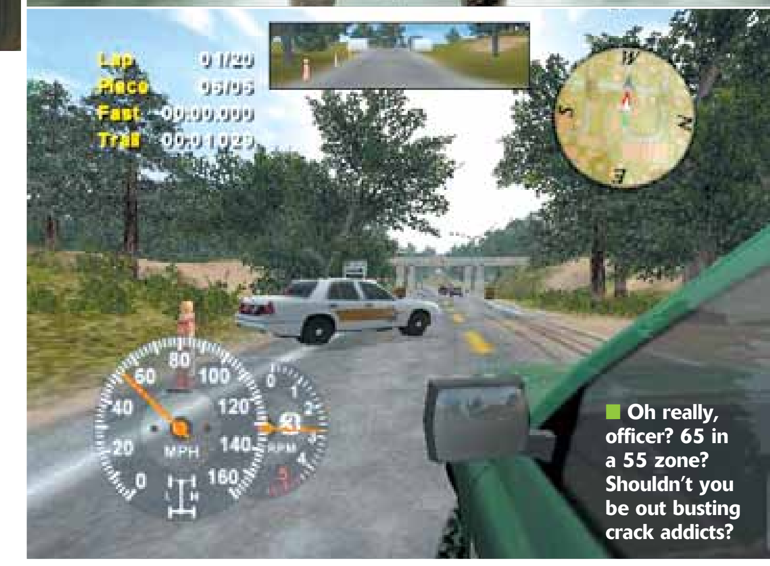

Classic game: *Marble Madness*
Frenzy **version: Same thing, but now it's a race**



Classic game: *Combat*
Frenzy **version: Same thing… but more special effects**


Classic game: *Tron*'s light cycles
Frenzy **version: Same thing, but… uh, same thing.**

US VS. THEM: Our staff would like to "officially" throw down the gauntlet to the staff at Next Gen for a serious match of *Fuzion Frenzy*. They think they're all that. They aren't, so bring it on.


"She'll be comin' 'round the mountain when she comes! She'll be comin' round the mountain..."


Oh really, officer? 65 in a 55 zone? Shouldn't you be out busting crack addicts?

Off-road madness or just off-the-mark blandness?

4X4 EVO 2

DEVELOPER **TERMINAL REALITY** | PUBLISHER **TAKE TWO** | MULTIPLAYER **1-4**
WEBSITE **WWW.TAKE2GAMES.COM** | EXTRAS **DOLBY DIGITAL 5.1**

The original *4X4 Evolution* was released earlier this year for just about every system except the Nintendo 64. It received only lukewarm reviews from critics, but the sales must have been good enough to justify a hasty sequel.

Not surprisingly, the follow-up is going to receive lukewarm reviews as well, starting with this one. One of the main problems with the first game, aside from its slow 20 mph uphill "races," was its ridiculously lunar physics. Two-ton pickups and SUVs bounced through the landscape as if their tires were filled with helium. Fortunately, the gravity has been turned up and the ridiculous flight times have been toned down for the sequel.

The main problem with *4X4 EVO 2* is that it has two distinctly different sides. On one hand, it wants to be a hardcore simulation on par with the *Gran Turismo* series, yet on the other, it also wants to be a good-ol'-boy rock-'n'-racer along the lines of *Smuggler's Run*. It actually doesn't do either particularly well or poorly.

The main new addition to this game is the greater emphasis on single-player driving over multiplayer racing. The Career mode now features off-road challenges, which pit you against the clock or other racers in an effort to complete objectives such as "find the missing rafts" or "find a crashed airplane."

The problem is that there is nothing particularly compelling about driving aimlessly through the woods looking for "secret areas." Knocking opponents into oncoming traffic during a high-speed race? Compelling. Looking for some missing hikers in a pickup truck? Not really.


The internal view is okay, but doesn't relay the orientation of the vehicle, which is vital on berms and banks.

And while the graphics are certainly respectable, they're not Xbox-caliber. The draw distances are much better, and the cars certainly look fantastic. But there is nothing so unbelievable that you would drag your Nintendo-loving friends into the room to see it. *4X4 EVO 2* has been slightly improved over the version of this game we saw a few months ago, but it still isn't the most compelling racing on the Xbox, or any box for that matter.

– Jim Preston

THE VERDICT

Graphics
Respectable. Draw distances are nice, with very little pop-up. The cars look great, and some of the environmental effects are well done.

Immersion
Poor. Collision detection with other cars is mushy, it's way too easy to drive completely submerged in water, and there's no damage modeling.

Sound
Solid. The Dolby Digital 5.1 is cool, and the engines sound great. We tired of the macho soundtrack before long, though.

Design
Average. The racing is fun, but the new single-player challenges are a bit of a snooze-fest.

GOOD (+), BAD (–), PERPLEXING (?)
+ Good graphics.
+ Improved physics.
+ Lots to upgrade.
– Boring, pointless career challenges.
– The racing is too slow.
? It's possible to drive straight through a lake. Huh?

Official Xbox magazine verdict **5.5** / 10.0

It's not called *2X2*

In *4X4 EVO 2*, there are more than 100 parts you can upgrade, more than 70 vehicles from 12 different manufacturers, and 32 different off-road tracks. But the most important number to remember is "4X4," because buying your first vehicle with only rear-wheel drive is simply wasting money.


This is the fastest way to the Qwik Stop in Modesto, California. Really.

4X4 DEVO: Off-road racing to the quirky sound of '80s hitmakers Devo. Now there's a game. Well, maybe not, but at least the name is kinda funny – or not. Sorry.



The grass looks much better on the Xbox, but the player models are still jaggy.

Official Xbox magazine XBOX ELITE Award for Excellence

The running game is flat-out awesome. Just follow your blockers and hit the holes.

ON THE GAME DISC Movie

Can you spot the differences between the PS2 and Xbox versions? Find out on the disc.

A great game is a great game on any system

Madden 2002

DEVELOPER **TIBURON** | PUBLISHER **ELECTRONIC ARTS** | MULTIPLAYER **1-4**
WEBSITE **MADDEN2002.EA.COM**

It takes about six seconds to see the difference between the Xbox and PS2 versions of *Madden 2002*. Unfortunately, it takes just about the same amount of time to completely forget about the differences. That, in a nutshell, is the good and the bad of this game we're reviewing.

No one would debate that *Madden 2002* was, before the Xbox, the greatest football game ever created. It was prettier, it had more depth, and it flat-out played better than anything else. But, also, no one would debate that this version is a lackluster port directly from the PS2 that hardly takes advantage of any of the Xbox's best features. For instance, the hard-drive could easily cache highlight files for post-game replays, the jaggies could have been cleaned up, and other nagging details could have been fixed. It's a small complaint; despite these negatives, *Madden* is still one of the most finely tuned franchises in the videogame world.

The gameplay is near-perfect. In fact, one of the very few knocks against last year's version (defensive AI that allowed long passes too often) has been mostly fixed this year. The running game is great, as usual – being a top runner requires more than quick reflexes, it also requires an ability to read holes and follow blockers. On defense, you'll have to be just as cagey. But if you are... you will absolutely be rewarded.

This brilliant gameplay is augmented with more features and depth than in any other sports game. There's the usual Franchise mode and Madden Cards, but this year, *Madden* tacked on two modes that greatly add to the gameplay experience. The first is the Training mode, which walks you through a number of key plays, shows you how they're supposed to be run, and then grades you on how well you execute. The second is the Two Minute Drill that evaluates your ability to score when the chips are down.

Frankly, we love the game, which is why we're so disappointed that it's just a rush port of the PS2 version. The Xbox is so much more powerful than Sony's console, and we'd love to see EA exploit this machine to its fullest. After all, the *Madden* series and the Xbox both deserve better.

– Dan Egger



Poor Dallas. Even these Browns players are laughing at the Cowboys this year.



Flutie shows that he's a true warrior... by ripping the heart out of defenders.



Graphics
The fields look much sharper than they do on the PS2, but the players look about the same, jaggies and all.

Immersion
With EA's world-class presentation, no football game looks more like the games you see on television.

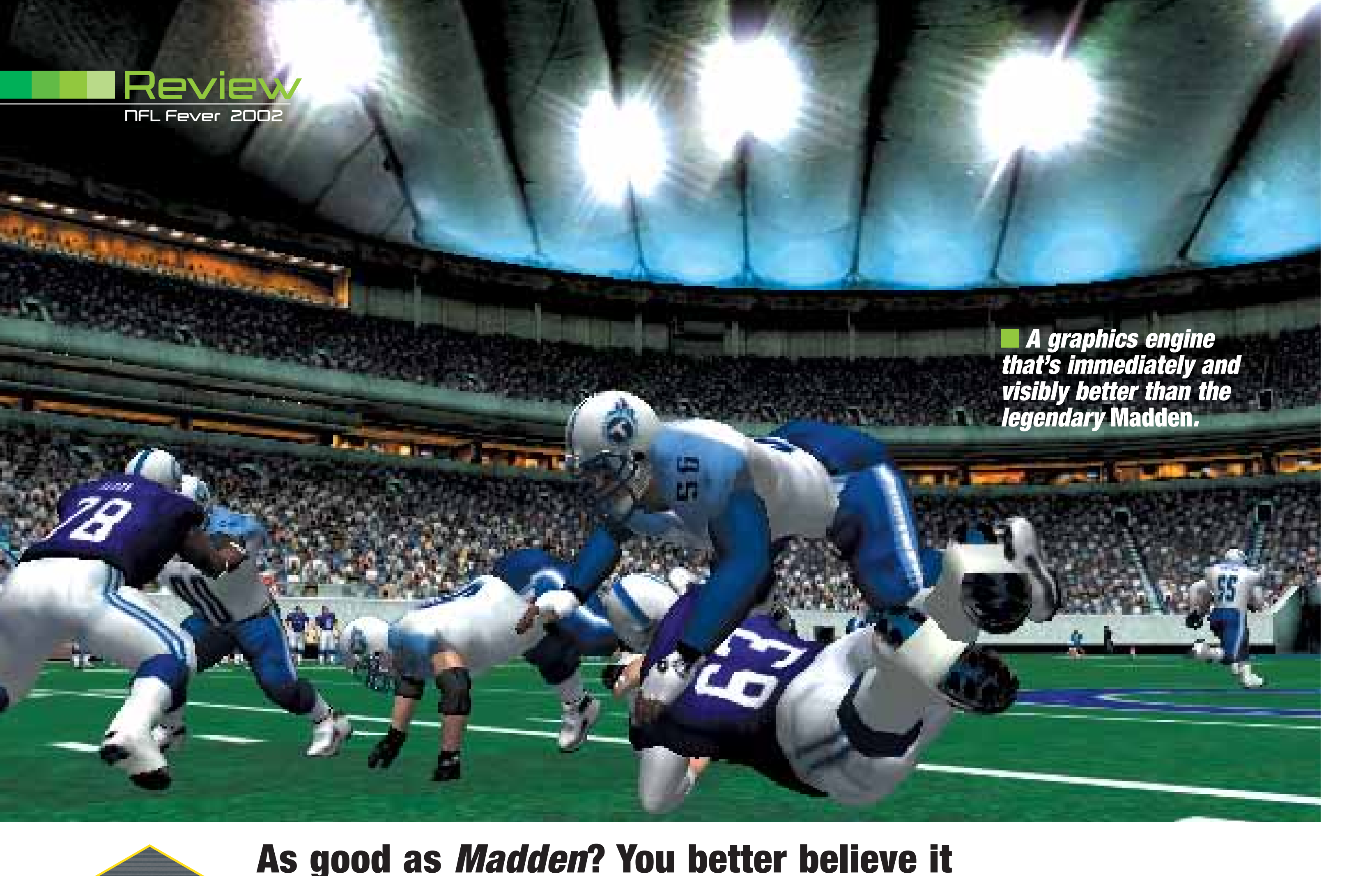
Sound
The game sounds are phenomenal, but they've really got to improve the commentary before Pat Summerall goes completely senile.

Design
This series has been constantly refined for more than a decade, and it works on nearly every level.

(+) Good. (–) Bad. (?) Perplexing
+ No sports game is deeper.
+ It feels like real football.
– It's not much more than a quick PS2 port.
– It doesn't really take advantage of the Xbox hardware.
? Can anyone explain what's going on with Madden's hair?



INSTANT MADDEN IMPRESSION: Step 1: Yell everything at the top of your lungs. Step 2: Start every sentence with "Look at that guy." Step 3: End every sentence with "BOOM!"



■ A graphics engine that's immediately and visibly better than the legendary Madden.

ON THE GAME DISC
Movie

Want to see just how accurate the stadium models are? Or how the player animations interact? Or maybe even how cool the crowd looks? Check out the in-game footage on our exclusive Xbox Game Disc. You'll be glad you did.

As good as *Madden*? You better believe it

NFL Fever 2002

Official Xbox magazine XBOX ELITE Award for Excellence

DEVELOPER **MICROSOFT** | PUBLISHER **MICROSOFT** | MULTIPLAYER **1-4**
WEBSITE **WWW.MICROSOFT.COM/GAMES/NFLFEVER2002**

NFL Fever 2002 is, to our astonishment, as good as *Madden* in terms of gameplay and better in terms of graphics.

Stop and breathe deeply for a moment if this statement causes you discomfort. After all, this is the first time out for the *Fever* series (unless you count the PC, and for sports, we *don't* count the PC). But the game is just that good. Starting with gameplay, it's hard to find many faults with this title.

The running game is surprisingly strong. The blockers block, holes open up, and the special moves are useful yet realistic. While EA's game focuses on timing in its passing game, *Fever* focuses on reading defenses, controlling receivers, and watching your QBs footwork. If you throw on the run, across your body, or backpedaling, your pass will lose considerable zip. It's best to stay in the pocket… and yes, for the first time ever, you can actually safely stay in the pocket and throw. Once you learn the style, it's as good as *Madden*'s passing game – maybe even better.

Defensively, *Fever* is also unique. Unlike *Madden*, you won't constantly threaten the quarterback with a lineman or linebacker – the blocking is a little too "good." However, in exchange, you'll be able to hit the Y button and your defensive position and assignment will pop up. This makes playing a defensive back or a middle linebacker more fun. You won't rack up 10 sacks per game, but you'll still control the D with smart play.

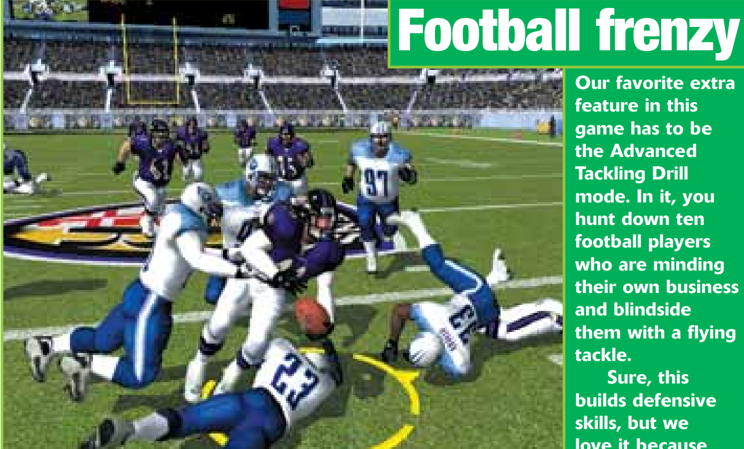
The gameplay surprised us… but that was nothing compared to our shock when we saw the finished graphics. *Fever* simply blows *Madden* away. The textures are better, the colors brighter, the stadiums more realistic, the jaggies less noticeable – even the grass looks greener. You can tell that this is an Xbox-native game, not a near-direct port from the PS2.

We also enjoyed the extras. The Training mode was way too short, but still unique and fun. The Franchise mode is smart and packed with detail. And after every game, the computer recalls the biggest plays and displays them in a clever highlight reel.

Fever isn't perfect. But right now, if we had to choose between it and *Madden*… we'd choose *Fever*. We can hardly believe it ourselves.

– Dan Egger

Football frenzy



Our favorite extra feature in this game has to be the Advanced Tackling Drill mode. In it, you hunt down ten football players who are minding their own business and blindside them with a flying tackle.

Sure, this builds defensive skills, but we love it because it unleashes the secret psychopath in us. The best thing to do is to "herd" all of the players together in one corner first (the clock doesn't start until you tackle someone) and then unleash your tackling terror. The poor saps won't even fight back.

■ No interference, just clarity.



■ Yes. That is the best grass texture ever seen in a football game.

Football giants, head-to-head



Madden 2002

NFL Fever 2002

Graphics
Winner: NFL Fever 2002
Less jaggies, cleaner textures, better player models, and better stadiums

Sound
Winner: Madden 2002
Smoother commentary, bigger hits, and louder crowds

Running game
Winner: Pick 'em
Both games feature excellent blocking and special moves

Passing game
Winner: Pick 'em
Madden feels more comfortable, but *Fever*'s passing is just as good and you can throw from the pocket

Defense
Winner: Pick 'em
Pass rushers will like *Madden*, and coverage guys will like *Fever*

AI
Winner: NFL Fever 2002
Wild passes into the secondary *will* get picked off

Presentation
Winner: Madden 2002
Stats, great camera angles, and an overall TV feel

Interface
Winner: Pick 'em
Fever has more plays on screen at the same time, but *Madden* shows yard markers on every play

Audibles
Winner: NFL Fever 2002
You can see the plays before you call them, and you can change receiver routes after reading the coverage. You can also read your assignments on defense before each snap

Depth
Winner: Madden 2002
Madden Cards, Two Minute Drill, and a more advanced training mode

Using the Xbox
Winner: NFL Fever 2002
Better graphics and hard-drive-stored highlights at the end of every game

OVERALL
Winner: NFL FEVER 2002 (4-3-4)
It's close enough that you'll enjoy whichever one you choose. Since we've been playing *Madden* since the early '80s, it's hard to let go of that classic feel – but the more we play *NFL Fever*, the more we like it. Right now, we prefer *Fever*. As with any sports game, the true test will come in longevity. Next issue, we'll break it down even further in a very special edition of Armchair Gamer. Don't miss it!

THE VERDICT

Graphics
It's no comparison. *Fever* is easily better looking than *Madden 2002* – or any other football game ever made.

Immersion
Although it lacks the overall depth of *Madden*, the gameplay feels real.

Sound
The commentary is a touch choppy at times, and the game sounds don't have the "oomph" of the competition.

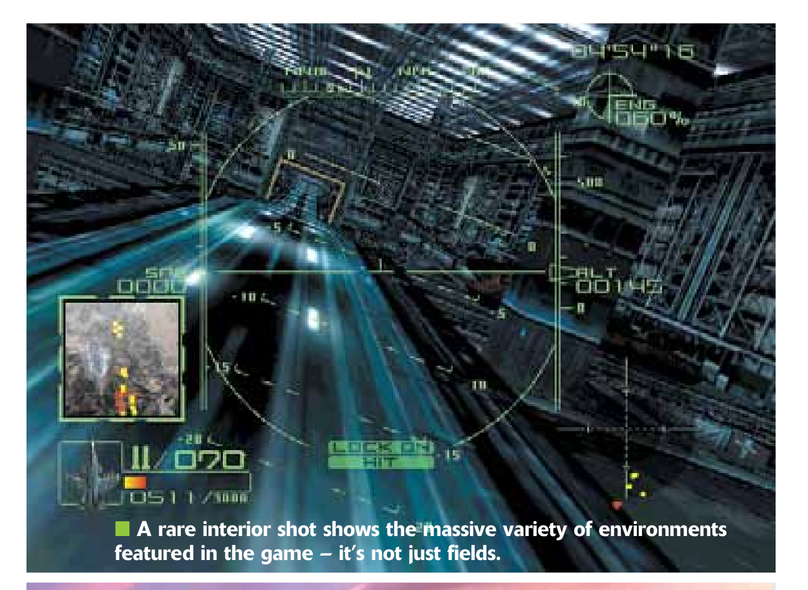
Design
Fever is amazingly polished for a first-time console sports game. We can't wait to see what they do next year.

GOOD (+), BAD (–), PERPLEXING (?)
+ It plays as well as *Madden*.
+ It takes full advantage of the Xbox hardware.
– It could use some more depth.
– The highlights and replays could use some polish.
? How did this game get so good so fast?

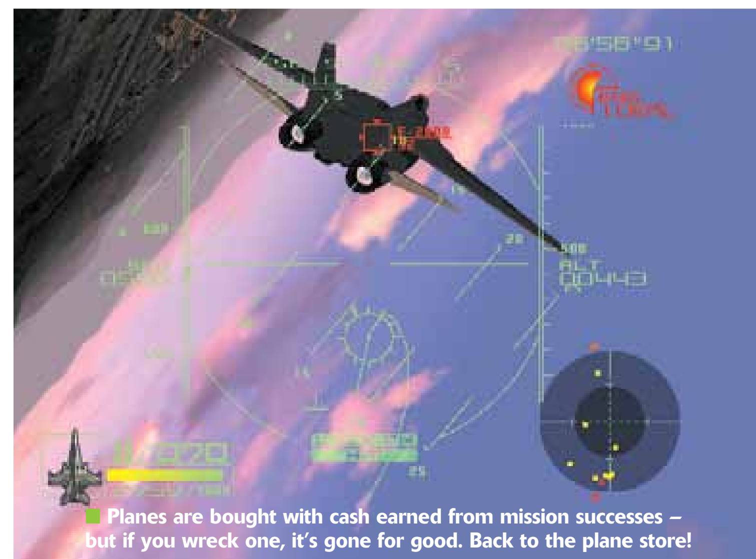


■ **UNNECESSARY TOUGHNESS:** Until the 1950s, footballs contained a near-lethal steel valve that could shoot out under pressure and injure anyone dumb enough to be in its path.

■ **IMAGINE THAT!:** Imagine Media, the company that brings you the fine **Official Xbox Magazine**, once bought the hill directly above San Francisco's 3Com (Candlestick) Park. Rumors that we bought it to spy on the Gold Rush are unfounded.


A rare interior shot shows the massive variety of environments featured in the game – it's not just fields.


Pink fluffy clouds and the warm glow of sunset mask the appalling danger lurking in front of you.


Planes are bought with cash earned from mission successes – but if you wreck one, it's gone for good. Back to the plane store!

Moments after the AirForce Beta Calm came...

AirForce Delta Storm

ON THE GAME DISC Movie

DEVELOPER **KONAMI** | PUBLISHER **KONAMI** | MULTIPLAYER **NO!**
WEBSITE **WWW.KONAMI.COM**

With an enormously simple seek-and-destroy premise, a *GT3*-style aircraft garage, and easily the best graphics yet seen on a console dogfighter, *AirForce Delta Storm* has a fair bit going for it. Right now in Japan, Namco's *Ace Combat* is making a big splash on PS2, and honestly, the games are remarkably similar.

The mission structure is based on a branching path that spiders out as you complete objectives on a map. A mission could be as simple as taking down a single enemy Ace, or as complex as preventing a beach landing, complete with Marine assault craft and an entire fleet of well-defended battleships. The gameplay is naturally dumbed-down from the controls and options you'd find on a full-blown PC simulator, but it is possible to select a more simmy mode, complete with full wing and tail rudder controls. And since you're apparently some type of mercenary, you're paid a cash bonus every time you complete an objective.

Cash, as it turns out, is very important (in life and this game), since it lets you buy new planes, and upgrade existing ones with *Gran Turismo*-style add-ons. Often, though, money is spent on bulking up your big-exploding-weapons quotient. Missiles have a nasty habit of going astray.

Graphically, the amazing draw distances, wonderful sky and cloud effects, and perfect, perfect aircraft make for a giddy ride. The only drawback in the art department is the sometimes-generic textures on mountains and fields. They don't hold up to as close an examination as, say, battleships or buildings.

The game does have one important flaw, and it's one that really holds this back from the classic status it might otherwise have attained – no multiplayer! Yup, we couldn't believe it either, but there isn't even a split-screen dogfight, never mind the LAN-based greatness we'd conjured up in our expectations.

– *Frank O'Connor*

THE VERDICT

Graphics
Huge, expansive environments that encompass layers of clouds, glittering seascapes, and detailed landscapes and aircraft.

Immersion
You would be hard-pressed to find a more absorbing console flight experience, thanks in large part to the blistering graphics.

Sound
Notable use of surround sound in game – hearing a missile behind you is quite unnerving. Horrible guitar-rock Muzak detracts a little, but can be nixed.

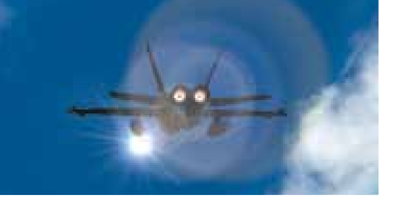
Design
Branching missions, upgradeable aircraft, and densely populated worlds make for an immersive and long-lasting experience.

GOOD (+), BAD (–), PERPLEXING (?)
+ Great, smooth graphics.
+ Cleverly designed mission structure.
– Horrible Eighties guitar riffs.
– Ground textures often jar with other, better details.
? No two-player mode!!!

Official Xbox magazine verdict 7.1 / 10.0

Plane Crazy

Current research is progressing at speed on so-called Hypersonic Scramjets, air-breathing combustion ramjets capable of traveling at speeds of between four and 15 times the speed of sound. Missiles using these engines are also in development. So equipped, an aircraft could fly very high in the atmosphere and reach a target anywhere on Earth in a couple of hours. Except for Worcester, Mass. You cahn't git theah from heah.



SPAZTRACKER: In last month's preview issue, we erroneously reported that THQ's *Dark Summit* would release in November 2002. It is, of course, November 2001. Dur.

In this case, "special" means "better than the PS2."



■ Although largely identical to the PS2 build, the Xbox version has better textures.



■ Frame rates are rock solid, even in two-player split-screen.



Star Wars Starfighter
Special Edition

DEVELOPER **SECRET LEVEL** | PUBLISHER **LUCASARTS** | MULTIPLAYER **1-2 VIA SPLIT-SCREEN**
WEBSITE **WWW.LUCASARTS.COM**

When the PS2 launched late last year, there was pretty much only one game that really showed off the potential promise of PS2 – *Starfighter* from LucasArts. Its combination of breathtaking graphics, tightly-plotted gameplay, and, of course, the *Star Wars* universe made it a smash hit. It's a year later, and now the game is available for Xbox. The question is: did LucasArts really put the "Special" in Special Edition?

The plot, for those unfamiliar with the PS2 game, is set firmly in and around the events portrayed in *Episode I* – that is to say, the Trade Federation's embargo of Naboo. You take on the role of either Naboo pilot Rhys Dallows, a pirate named Nym, or Vana Sage, a ruthless (yet sexy) mercenary. Each pilot has his or her own preferred form of spacecraft, and you switch between them as missions take you from deep space to a volcanic mining colony, all the way to the interior of a Trade Federation starship. Mission objectives vary just as wildly as the locales.

The Xbox Special Edition features not only better, faster, smoother graphics, but higher-resolution textures as well as five new bonus missions. The plot and initial objectives remain identical. Unlocking the new (and old) bonus missions is done in the time-honored tradition of fighting games – beat the whole game at every difficulty level.

The biggest improvement, however, is the inclusion of fully fleshed-out two-player modes. The five new multiplayer modes are Capture the Flag, Dogfight, Tag, Detonator Drop, and Hunter. Each provides a sufficiently different challenge to make *Starfighter* stand out as a more ambitious effort on Xbox.

It's not perfect, but it's a great start.

– Frank O'Connor

■ Thanks to crisper resolutions and the near elimination of stutter, the space battles are now an altogether less confusing experience. The enemy ships are a lot sharper, too.

THE VERDICT

Graphics
Smoother than butter sliding down a toboggan run on a greased banana peel, but still suffer from pasty lightmaps.

Immersion
It's *Star Wars*, after all, and it's not hard to get swept up in the whole thing – carried along by the pretty well put-together plot and then dropped butt-first into the *Star Wars* universe.

Sound
Easily the best feature of the game. See, we hear there's this guy by the name of John Williams...

Design
The clarifying effect of the superior Xbox graphics is further assisted by the inclusion of a properly fleshed-out two-player mode.

(+) Good, (–) Bad, (?) Perplexing
+ A real, solid two-player mode; marginally, yet greatly improved graphics; and 3D sound all make it a more immersive experience.
– The graphics, while unarguably lovely, don't make much use of the Xbox's superior capabilities, such as bump-mapping and droid-shading.
? Why isn't this *Rogue Leader*?



Star Wars: The Sin Bin

Not many people realize that before George Lucas settled on *Attack of the Clones*, he had considered a number of other titles for his latest installment. These are the names that didn't make the cut:	*Star Wars Episode II: The Big Scary Palace* *Star Wars Episode II: The Awful Monsters* *Star Wars Episode II: The Fabulous Jar-Jar Boys* *Star Wars Episode II: When We Were Things* *Star Wars Episode II: The Wizard of Yippee!* *Star Wars Episode II: Let's Hug Ewoks* *Star Wars Episode II: The Force Is Germs* *Star Wars Episode II: Mom's Still a Slave* *Star Wars Episode II: Gotta Catch 'Em All* *Star Wars Episode II: The Moppet Movie* *Star Wars Episode II: Naked Robots of Love*

■ **JAR-JAR CAMEO:** Jar-Jar will return in the second movie, but sources say he's in it for just a few torturous seconds. Thank goodness. Meesa sick of him.

Reader Interaction

Look, we have no idea if there's going to be a *Dragonball Z* game on Xbox. And no, you cannot play PC games or PlayStation games on your Xbox. Whew! Now that we've cleared out 90% of our mailbag with those two answers, we can finally move onto the intelligent, challenging questions that remain. If you want to join the few, the proud, the enlightened, then send us your Xbox-related questions, queries, and inquiries at: xboxmagazine@imaginemedia.com. Or if you've still yet to emerge from under your Camaro-driving, Goody-comb-sporting, Farrah Fawcett-poster-loving, feathered-hair-wearing, no-email rock, then you can send a letter to: **Official Xbox Magazine, c/o Imagine Media, 150 N. Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005**. Yes, it'll get to the right place, but we can't promise that we have letter openers. Letter openers are soooo 1978…

Out of online

I've already reserved and paid for my Xbox, and I'm anxiously awaiting the arrival of November 15. The biggest question I have regarding the Xbox is about online playability. I know that the console comes with broadband support right out of the box, but what about those of us who don't have a high-speed Internet connection? Will there be a 56K add-on that we can purchase? I've tremendously enjoyed my Dreamcast's online games and sold the system in order to pay for my Xbox, so I'm hoping you can shed some light on this subject. Thanks a lot and good luck with the magazine.

Shawn Fitzgerald
Atlanta, Texas

We say: *We hate to say it, Shawn, but the Xbox will NOT support any narrowband connections, according to Microsoft. Therefore, the only way to play online games with Xbox will be through broadband, which, while gaining wider acceptance across the country and the globe, still hasn't overtaken dial-up connections. We don't yet know if Microsoft will allow any third-party companies to create 56K modems for Xbox, like Sony did with the PS2 in Japan, but we highly doubt it. Maybe it's time to invest in making your gameroom DSL- or cable-ready, Shawn.*

The Ego has landed

Sony has *Final Fantasy*, Nintendo has *Zelda*, and Xbox has *Project Ego*! In my opinion, they're all system sellers. I believe *Project Ego* is going to sell the Xbox! I've heard from a lot of former GameCube fans on the Internet forums that they're thinking of buying an Xbox just to play *Ego*.

But what I want to know is how much freedom there will be in the game. I've heard that you can slap children, chop down a tree, build a home with the wood, then get married, and even more! Please tell me every gory detail!

Is it going to be completely exclusive to Xbox? I don't think it could be achieved on any other system because it sounds so complex, graphically and gameplay-wise.

Elliot Zeckler a.k.a. Zekklen
Via email

We say: *Funny you should ask. On page 54 of this issue we give all of the gory details that are available on this amazing title. Go ahead and drool at the screenshots and marvel at the meticulously crafted editorial. We don't mind.*

Gameplayer hater

I'm confused. Xbox is going to be or already is the most powerful console out there. So why don't people like it? I have researched and looked at the different platforms and their games. I've come to the conclusion that PS2 games are much worse than Xbox games. Are all the people complaining just Microsoft haters? How good is the system really going to be? Will it beat out GameCube?

Chad
Via email

We say: *A tough question, Chad, because it's mostly subjective. Going off of system specs, yes, Xbox is the most powerful console among its competitors. But does this mean that it's the best? Not necessarily.*

What makes a system really "good" (and again, this is subjective) is the quality of the games available for it. Then again, the Dreamcast had a bunch of really top-notch titles available for it but this did nothing in helping it succeed. Instead, the PS2 won out with a fraction of the games and little-to-no marketing muscle. Sometimes it's just timing, luck, and pure, unadulterated hype.

There are a lot of factors in helping a system succeed, and just as many in making it a failure. So, to answer your questions, all we can really predict about Xbox is that we're stoked about a lot of games and that it's pretty damn powerful. Whether it will be better than PS2 or GameCube, well… that'll be for the public to decide. We feel that people who spend all their time making ridiculous predictions about another system's failure should instead work at saving their money up to buy all of the systems. That way, they might realize that being a true gamer means playing everything.

Bigger, longer, faster, more

I heard that Xbox discs are a DVD-9 instead of a DVD-5. So, does this mean that games will be longer and more challenging?

Fury Wilson
Via email

We say: *Just like with the shift from CDs to DVDs, Fury, it's entirely up to developers how to allocate the amount of storage space on Xbox's DVD-9s. Whether it will result in more detailed environments, more speech, longer games, or all the above, it will depend on what the development team is trying to accomplish in their games. But, yes, DVD-9 does allow for increased storage space over DVD-5. Whether companies choose to use it or not is up to them. We hope they do.*

Adults only

Like so many others, I am waiting patiently for the release of Xbox, and all that comes with it. I'm both a PC gamer and a console gamer, so the Xbox is high on my list of "things to buy." My question is: Can we expect to see more "adult-oriented" games, as compared to the types set for release on GameCube? For example, a few simulations (flight sims, tank racing, etc.), and certainly some military-based first-person shooters?

Lanny Erdos
Via email

We say: *No worries, Lanny. You can definitely expect to see a good selection of games geared toward "mature" gamers, as Xbox is squarely aimed at taking the older gaming market, rather than the younger. Flight shooters like* AirForce Delta Storm, *strategy shooters like* Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon, *and even the ultra-spooky* Silent Hill 2 *are typical examples of what Microsoft is going for with its software library. What? You weren't expecting any genuine AO-rated titles, were you?*

■ The Rock takes a moment to smell some of his own cooking.

Rassle-mania

I was just wondering about ***WWF: Raw Is War***. **In previous THQ wrestling games, you can't modify the wrestlers unless you use the Create-a-Wrestler mode and clone them. Is the ability to modify the "super star" wrestlers (such as their moves, costumes, who escorts them to the ring, etc.) available in *WWF: Raw Is War*?**

I sure hope so, because the storylines change so fast in the actual WWF that if the option is not available, the game will seem "out of date" rather quickly.

Taintmonster@webtv.net

We say: ***We took your question to THQ and got the "official" response that follows: "The Rock listens to the people. If you want to take perfectly good superstars and alter them, go right ahead. We'll let you do that. But don't make The Rock look foolish." What exactly that means, Taintmonster, we're not sure, but consider yourself warned.***

Don't believe the hype

The hype surrounding the Xbox claims that it will revolutionize gaming. Your staff also says things like: "Xbox will push the limit of game artists' imaginations," and "It will change the way games are played." This is all well and good, but these "claims" sound like things we've all heard before, about other consoles before they launch. Next thing you know, the system that was so highly anticipated flops like a Kevin Bacon movie. Are all "system failures" different from each other? What have the developers of the Xbox learned from the past and how will Microsoft make sure Xbox doesn't end up at a garage sale like a Jaguar or Neo Geo?

Gabe Garcia
Via email

We say: ***Didn't you ever see* The Big Picture *or* He Said She Said? *That Kevin Bacon is a Hollywood hitmaker and we won't have you belittling one of the finest thespians of our time. Viva Le Bacon! Oh, and we don't know for sure that the Xbox will be a huge hit, we're just making an educated guess (and bet) that the Xbox will be brilliant. If not, then blame Bill Gates – not Kevin Bacon.***

That Kevin Bacon is a Hollywood hitmaker and we won't have you belittling one of the finest thespians of our time. Viva Le Bacon!

Green light redlighted

I've heard that the Xbox jewel on the controller, as well as the controller cords, are going to slightly glow greenish, as if they had small lights in them, when the system is turned on. Could this be true?

Frank M.
Via email

We say: *At one point there were plans to have the controller jewel glow when the system was turned on, but those plans were scrapped long ago. Unfortunately, the idea wasn't very cost effective (in fact, it was outrageously expensive). Now, the jewel is black with a green logo, and the controller cord is a transparent green. Very cool-looking in our book, but a no-go for the glow.*

Life is just a game …

My favorite movie from the last five years is *The Matrix*. I mean, did you guys see those special effects? I would love to play a game based on *The Matrix*, and I have already preordered an Xbox at my local store. If a *Matrix* game came out for Xbox, I might buy it twice! Since you're the official mag, do you know if there's any chance?

Dan Southard
Via email

We say: *You're in luck, Dan. Interplay is set to publish a game for Xbox based off of the sequel to* The Matrix. *To be developed by California-based Shiny (*MDK, Earthworm Jim, Messiah, *etc.), the release of the game is scheduled to coincide with the movie's release sometime in 2003. While it's not set in stone that the game is exclusive to Xbox, Microsoft paid a pretty penny to Interplay to secure the license. In other words, Dan – better start saving up for that extra Xbox. Check out* The Rumor Mole *on page 32 for some more Matrix-related goodness… or don't, see if we care.*

Avast, ye matey

I have a question about the Xbox DVD player. Now, I know I have to buy a controller before I can watch DVDs, but I was wondering if I could watch VCDs that I made. Not saying that I pirate DVDs, but basically I just want to know if Xbox will support playing my CDRs? So, if you can give me a shout back I'd appreciate it.

We say: Bypassing any possible ethical queries we may have about homemade VCDs or pirated movies, and wondering why we're answering this question in the first place, Anonymous Reader, the answer is a resounding NO. And we can't say that we would be happy if there was a way to do it, anyhow, as Xbox is a games machine, first and foremost. That's why the DVD functionality is separate from the system, right off the bat. Now, if you had some legitimate VCDs or DVDs, then that might be another story…

Garage kits

What would it take to get a development kit for the Xbox? Other console units out there have homebrew libraries and demos. What is Microsoft's opinion on people developing software for the Xbox in their garage?

Jeff Kurtz
Via email

We say: *While Microsoft doesn't currently support anything closely similar to Sony's simplistic, do-it-yourself Net Yaroze program, it does have a support base in place for independent developers, Jeff. If you're over 18 and you've already purchased Visual C++, you can request an Xbox Prototyping Kit (XPK) for free, through Microsoft's Xbox Independent Developer Program. While no hardware or peripherals are included in the kit that is sent to you if you're approved, you will receive a complete set of documents that outline development on Xbox. If you'd like to check out the program for yourself, you can do so by logging onto http://dev.xbox.com/. Good luck. Don't make a crap game, please.*

Install this

I was wondering about the hard-drive in the Xbox. There are rumors that it was pushed up to 10 GB then pushed back down to 8 GB. What is the actual size of the hard-drive? And will there be an installation process like *Final Fantasy X* for the PS2 on the Xbox?

Adriano Burgo
Via Email

We say: *Wow, Adriano (officially our most loyal and beloved reader), that's your second question printed in as many issues. The final capacity for the Xbox hard-drive is 10 GB. It was, at one time, 8 GB, but Microsoft added 2 GB for the final version of the system. And no, you'll never install any sort of game onto the Xbox hard-drive. It can only be used for game saves, Internet play, and scratch-disk functions.*

X-Cast: Sega on Xbox

Since Sega has made the move to become a third-party publisher on all platforms, do you agree that the company seems to be focusing most of its future in Xbox? Have you heard of any Xbox exclusives by Sega? Even better, will *Shenmue III* be on Xbox?

Jeff Hoffman
Via email

We say: *"Ecstatic" is the probably the most accurate description of how we feel about Sega on Xbox. While Sega's head honcho Peter Moore has declared the company to be "platform agnostic," we are excited that Xbox will premiere many of Sega's top games, such as* Jet Set Radio Future *and* Panzer Dragoon Next *(working title). As for Yu Suzuki's amazing AM2 team, rumors have been circulating that its groundbreaking* Shenmue *series may look to continue the saga on Xbox because Suzuki feels that it is the only system powerful enough to handle the series. True? Only time will tell. After all, AM2's VF4 is headed to PS2, not Xbox. Stay tuned: we'll have the whole story on Sega featured in the cover story in our next issue.*

Defining "high definition"

I'm getting an Xbox at launch (even if I need to beat up a kid for it), but I'm also buying an HDTV for it. I have a $3,500 spending limit for a new television, so please tell me: What's the best HDTV for the money (brand, visuals, and sound quality)?

Losses2no1@AOL.COM

We say: *For the amount of money you're tooling around with, there should be a Pioneer HDTV to suit you perfectly. If you're still wondering what to buy or what to look for, check out our mini-feature in this very issue on the ideal Xbox setup (pg 73).*

Lara, Lara, Lara

Okay, so the lineup of games is looking pretty good, but I'm a big *Tomb Raider* fan. Will Lara be on the 'Box anytime soon? I have to make a purchasing decision, soon, as my ol' PC ain't cutting it, graphics-wise.

Also, will I be able to play PC games on Xbox? Or will I be able to output my PC through the Xbox to take advantage of the 256 channels of audio output?

I want an Xbox, but I need my Lara fix!

Joseph Hogan
Portland, Maine

We say: ***While it hasn't been officially announced or confirmed for Xbox, Joseph, we're willing to bet money on the fact that Microsoft's big black box will be home to a future game featuring Ms. Croft in all her tomb-raiding glory. According to our unnamed sources, the next generation of Lara's cave-spelunking shenanigans is being considered for Xbox.***

In regards to your questions about playing PC games on Xbox or hooking it up to your PC for audio output, the answer is "no." Only Xbox games will play on the system, and it doesn't have any "in" jacks.

■ **WE DON'T WATCH WRESTLING, HONEST:** But does anyone else fondly reminisce about that whole McMahon-Helmsley Faction thing that was going on for a while there? Umm, not us.

■ **BACON BITS:** Obviously, we have the utmost respect for cinematic artist Kevin Bacon but we've seen a bit "too much sausage" and not enough Bacon in recent movies like *Wild Things* and *The Invisible Man*.

Take control of your Xbox with Gamester!

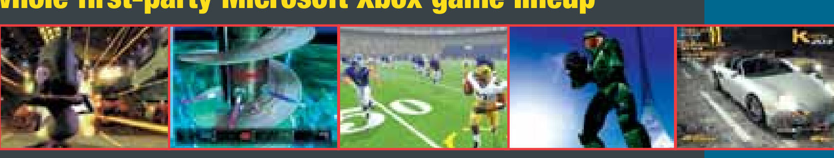
Win everything you need to complement your new Xbox!

Buying a system at launch these days culminates in little more than arriving home with a console and a controller (if you don't count the random power and AV cords, that is). No games, no cool optional controllers, and certainly, no arcade sticks. So what's a hardcore gamer to do? Why, enter the **Official Xbox Magazine** and Gamester contest to fully flesh out your launch collection, of course!

By simply sending in your name, address, age, and phone number on a 4x6 postcard (no letters or sealed envelopes will be accepted), you have a chance to win everything you need in order to start off your Xbox gaming experience on the right foot (err… thumb).

We've teamed up with Gamester in order to bestow on one lucky Grand Prize winner a slew of Xbox goodies that includes:

■ The whole first-party Microsoft Xbox game lineup



Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee
Fuzion Frenzy
NFL Fever 2002
Halo
Project Gotham Racing

■ The entire Gamester Xbox peripheral collection:

Vortex Controller: The über-hip, silver-top, significantly more streamlined standard controller that's light and ready for action.

Cortex Memory Card: The Gamester take on saving games with 8MB of portable memory goodness.

Xbox Link Cable: Got a friend with an Xbox? Got two copies of a linkable game (i.e. *Halo*, *Tony Hawk 2x*, etc.)? Got two televisions? Then get linking!

Reflex Arcade Stick: A fighting fan's must-have – Gamester's sleek, designed take on the arcade stick.

Xbox Pro Racer: A racing wheel that's also a controller? Yup, a handheld racing wheel that's half wheel, half controller, with precision analog steering. It's perfect for space-conscious racing fans.

■ Vortex Controller

■ Cortex Memory Card

■ Reflex Arcade Stick

■ Xbox Pro Racer

■ A full-year's subscription to the Official Xbox Magazine.

■ A swank Gamester T-shirt.

But the Grand Prize Winner isn't the only lucky duck. Ten Second Prize winners will also be chosen to receive a much coveted Xbox Pro Racer. Don't play *Project Gotham Racing* or *NASCAR Heat* without it.

And it doesn't end there. 100 Third Prizes of a Gamester T-shirt will be awarded to 100 lucky winners, as well. What more could you ask for? Fame? Fortune? Respect? Well, you can ask for those, but that's another contest in some other publication.

So, what are you waiting for? Get scribbling and send in the following information on a postcard to:

Xbox "Take Control" Contest
c/o Imagine Media
150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005

- **Name**
- **Full Mailing Address** (partial addresses will be ignored)
- **Age**
- **Phone Number**

Or, you can simply email the above information to us at xboxmag@imaginemedia.com. The subject header should be "Gamester Xbox Magazine Contest." If it doesn't have this header, then there's no guarantee that your entry will be considered.



Legal Stuff: Entries must be received no later than December 14, 2001. Winners will be chosen on or about January 11, 2002, and winners will be notified either by e-mail or telephone. A list of winners will be sent to anyone who requests it and who provides a self-addressed, stamped envelope. The odds of winning depend upon the number of entries received. Imagine shall not be responsible for lost, late, misdirected, or incomplete entries. Prizes are nontransferable and no substitutions will be allowed. Winners will be determined by a single random drawing of all valid entries and the decision of Imagine shall be final. This contest is open to residents of the United States only. Return of any prize or prize notification as undeliverable will result in disqualification and an alternate winner will be selected. Winners may be required to sign an affidavit of eligibility/release of liability/prize acceptance within seven days of receipt; failure to do so upon request will result in forfeiture of the prize. By acceptance of the prize, winners agree to the use of their name and/or likeness for purposes of advertising, trade, or promotion without further compensation, unless prohibited by law. Imagine shall not be responsible for any damages or expenses that winners might incur as a result of this contest or the receipt of any prize. Winners are responsible for paying income taxes on the value of the prize received. Lastly, while no purchase is necessary to win, this contest is limited to residents of the United States, excepting in Arizona, Maryland, Vermont, Puerto Rico, where it is void, and where ever else it might also be prohibited by law.

■ **PLEASE FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS:** Because as much as we love throwing away entries, it severely limits your chance to win, and that may make you sad.

On the Disc:

Trailers:
AirForce Delta Storm
Amped
Arctic Thunder
Cel Damage
Dark Summit
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2
Dead or Alive 3
Galleon
Hunter: The Reckoning
Mad Dash Racing
Madden 2002
NASCAR Heat
New Legends
NFL Fever 2002
Project Gotham Racing
Shrek
Star Wars Starfighter: Special Edition
The Thing
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2x
Ultimate Fighting Championship: Tapout
WWF Raw Is War

Features
Designing Xbox
Horace Luke and Jeff Henshaw discuss what it took to design the Xbox.
The Xbox Difference
Seamus Blackley tells us what makes the Xbox the ultimate console.

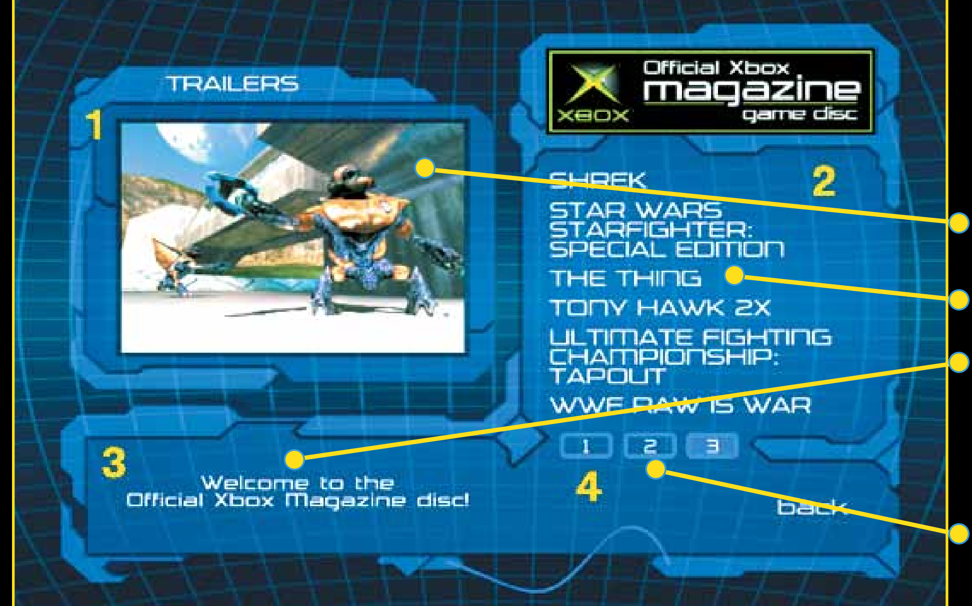
The Disc

See the games in motion!

About a week or so after you get this issue of **Official Xbox Magazine**, you'll probably be walking home with a brand-new Xbox and a big fat smile on your face. We figured it would be too cruel to make you wait that long to see your favorite Xbox games in action, so our first disc is a DVD that will run on any DVD player. Yes, that includes that dusty PS2 (it's about time you put it to good use). This month's disc is loaded to the brim with as much high-quality video as we could fit on a 5.4 Gigabyte disc, which amounts to 21 trailers, two very special interviews, and our very own "video billboard."

And if you like what you see, get ready to experience the real deal next month when we provide you with our first REAL interactive Xbox Game Disc with REAL playable demos and loads more gameplay footage, and extras too!





The interface explained

If you've interacted with a DVD before, just pop it in the DVD player and skip the section below… it's a piece of cake.

VIDEO BILLBOARD: A wall of video packed with cool trailers and quick bits to entertain and amaze you while you browse the interface.

MENU SYSTEM: Navigate and select to view content from the lists shown here.

TEXT MESSAGES: Read the (we hope) interesting and fun facts here that relate to what is happening on the video billboard. It's like "Pop-Up Video," but without that annoying bubble sound.

PAGE CHANGER: When viewing the trailers, use these buttons to switch between the lists of trailers.





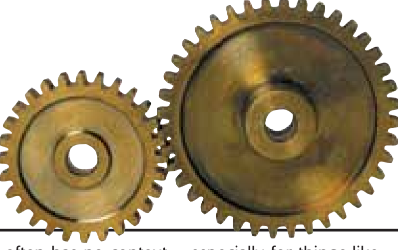
Disc problems: If you experience problems playing the Official Xbox Magazine Game Disc, gently clean the suface with a clean, soft cloth. If this doesn't help, go to http://www.officialxboxmagazine.com to order a replacement.

Ad Index December, 2001

Looking for the perfect game ad? Want to know about some other games coming to the Xbox. Just point and… uhh… turn (sorry, haven't figured out how to "click" with magazines yet – we're working on it).

■ **3D OR NOT 3D, THAT IS THE QUESTION:** This issue's DVD is awesome, no doubt about it, but next issue's Xbox Game Disc will be programmed as an Xbox app – and that means it will feature a fully 3D interface as well as playable software!

Explain-a-tron™



The problem with the first issue of any magazine is that since it has no history, it often has no context – especially for things like reviews. As you finish reading the magazine, you might be thinking to yourself, "Sure, they loved *Dead or Alive 3*, but that's one of the first games on the system, and this is the first issue. Do these guys even know what they're talking about?"

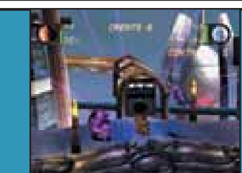
Well, yes, we bloody well do. The magazine staff is pretty old-school, with some of the crustier ones weighing in with twelve years of videogame magazine experience. Our *least* experienced staffer has five years in the business. They really, really know their videogames. But like we said, it's all about context, so let's give you some. This is what we'd give some classic games (which you should know well) if we reviewed them today:

Game: *Super Mario 64*
BY: **NINTENDO**
ON: **NINTENDO 64**
OUR SCORE: **9.5**



Still the only game to flawlessly exploit the idea of a 3D platform game, *Mario 64* might never be bettered (except by Shigeru Miyamoto himself). Subsequent clones from Rare got too convoluted and never really packed the same pace and effortless style. Add to that a catchy soundtrack by Nintendo's musical genius, Koji Kondo, and you have yourself the best platform game ever made. In 3D, anyway.

Game: *Fantastic Four*
BY: **ACCLAIM**
ON: **PLAYSTATION**
OUR SCORE: **1.2**



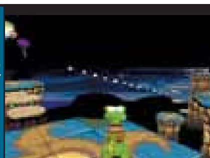
They couldn't even get the name right. It's not fantastic in any way, and there are actually five of them, thanks to the inclusion of She Hulk. This side-scrolling *Final Fight* rip-off's mixture of ugly 3D backdrops and horrific gameplay was never good, not even when it was first released. Someone at Acclaim is reading this now and thinking, why did they drag this out again? Because it deserves it. That's why.

Game: *Red Alert 2*
BY: **WESTWOOD**
ON: **PC CD-ROM**
OUR SCORE: **8.8**



With enhanced graphics, new units, and tons of new maps, scenarios, and strategies, this sequel managed to make itself a worthy successor without actually innovating much – it's a case of evolution rather than revolution. But that's exactly what fans of the original wanted, and Westwood, as ever, delivered it with style. And at least it didn't turn out as a huge disappointment like *Tiberian Sun*.

Game: *Croc*
BY: **FOX INTERACTIVE**
ON: **PLAYSTATION**
OUR SCORE: **6.1**



The very picture of mediocrity. Although technically pretty polished, thanks to a slick engine from Argonaut, *Croc* seemed like the product of too many focus groups and marketing meetings. He was a reptile with attitude. All the attitude in the world didn't save his scaly green behind from tedious level design and mediocre control. Not as offensive as, say, *Bubsy 3D*, or even *Punky Skunk*, but basically pointless in a world inhabited with *Crash* and *Spyro*.

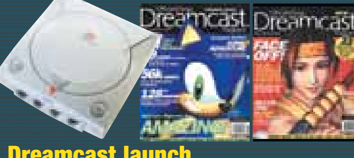
The numbers never lie

Even the staff at **Official Xbox Magazine** was shocked with the quality of Xbox games for review in our Premiere Issue. We consider ourselves tough graders, yet we couldn't believe how high the review scores ended up being. The basic fact is this: The Xbox delivered in a big way, unlike any current-day console launch we've seen. It just so happens we have the statistics to back this bold statement up.





PlayStation2 launch
As covered in: *PSM*
- Total games reviewed: **13**
- Rating scale: **1-10**
- High score: **10 (*SSX*)**
- Low score: **4 (*X Squad*)**
- Average score: **6.9**
- The skinny: *SSX*, *Tekken Tag*, and *Madden* were all great games, but after that there was absolutely nothing until *GT3* finally came out a year later.



Dreamcast launch
As covered in: *Official Sega Dreamcast Magazine*
- Total games reviewed: **12**
- Rating scale: **1-10**
- High score: **9 (*Soul Calibur*)**
- Low score: **3 (*Mortal Kombat Gold*)**
- Average score: **7.4**
- The skinny: A host of good fighting games and the largely overrated *Sonic* game helped keep the scores up for what was a great launch line-up.



Xbox launch
As covered in: *Official Xbox Magazine*
- Total games reviewed: **13**
- Rating scale: **0.0-10.0**
- High score: **9.5 (*Dead or Alive 3*)**
- Low score: **5.5 (*4X4 Evo 2*)**
- Average score: **8.0**
- The skinny: *Halo* and *DoA3* highlight the most complete – and well-balanced – launch line-up since the days of Super Nintendo.

Next month

Sega on Xbox

The former console maker and Japanese hit factory steps up to Xbox – and delivers. We've got the exclusive on its entire line-up and an interview with its president. SEGA!

Strategy extravaganza

You bought your Xbox. You bought *Halo* and *DoA3*. Now the **Official Xbox Magazine** is here to give you the insider tips that'll make your games more enjoyable. Secrets, codes, and dirty tactics just for you.

20 reviews!

The games keep coming, and **Official Xbox Magazine** is here to sort through the best and worst. Don't buy a game until you read our reviews.

Japan invasion

Fresh from Tokyo Game Show, we report on the best Japanese Xbox games, including Dream Factory's hot new fighter (character shown here).

The real disc

We hope you enjoyed our DVD disc, but next issue is the real deal...

Xbox Game Disc

Five Playable Demos!

Only the **Official Xbox Magazine** gives you the chance to play demos of upcoming Xbox games. Next issue, get ready to test out *Tony Hawk 2x*, *Munch's Oddysee*, *Cel Damage*, *4X4 Evo 2*, and *Fuzion Frenzy*. More games, more information, and more entertainment than really should be allowed by law.



Test out *Tony Hawk 2x* for yourself on the next disc.

PLUS!!! Grandma Dixie is back, and this time she means it.

THE MISSING LINK: The only person in the world who wrote reviews of launch games for *PSM*, *Official Sega Dreamcast Magazine*, and *Official Xbox Magazine* is our very own Dan Egger – we're guessing they were all turned in late.